

# THE PENGUIN NEW WRITING

*Edited by*  
**JOHN LEHMANN**

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*Photogravure Illustrations between pages 64 and 65*

<sup>1</sup> Specially written for this issue of *Penguin New Writing*

<sup>2</sup> First publication in Great Britain

## *About the new contributors*

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G. S. FRASER was born in Glasgow in 1915, and educated at Aberdeen Grammar School and St. Andrews. He served in the Middle East during the war. Since 1945, he has lived in London, and three years ago, he won a literary bursary given by Hodder and Stoughton and the Society of Authors. He has published two books of poems, a prose work about Scotland, and a translation of *The Dedicated Life* in Poetry by Patrice de la Tour du Pin.



## Foreword

The curious searcher after coincidence may find pleasure in noting in this number of *Penguin New Writing*, the first to appear since the actual signing of the Atlantic Pact, how many stories and poems appear from British, American and French authors which are about the sea, or have the sea for their background. Jules Supervielle, one of the greatest of the older generation of poets in France, contributes a fantasy the opening words of which have a symbolic ring in connexion with the Treaty: 'What sailors, with the aid of what architects, had built it on the high Atlantic ocean...?' In the poem by Harry Duncan, a new and promising young poet from New England, there are lines, all the more effective for occurring in a work the theme of which has nothing to do with politics or pacts, which hint at the newly insistent American undertow of thought, pulling ineluctably towards the ocean: 'Due East lay Europe, Asia dark beyond...' Helen Spalding and E. J. Scovell both write of the sea that the English have always watched and listened to from their holiday beaches and cliff cottages, the symbol of myriad facets always repeated and renewed; while even in the traffic of London Laurie Lee, dreaming of lobster-buses and oyster-poets, cannot escape the haunting of the same sea. Patrick Leigh-Fermor, poet as well as intrepid soldier, reveals that he is the latest of many Englishmen in all ages to fall under the spell of islands, above all those islands of the Aegean from which the seeds were blown to make the garden of our own northern islands' civilization; and he is echoed by one of the most brilliant of the new generation of Greek poets, Odysseus Elytis, in his beautiful *Sadness of the Aegean*.

Perhaps it is fanciful to imagine that there is more than an accident of geography in the fact that all those who find

themselves united in the new Western alliances to-day, have the sea in their blood and imagination; there are, after all, seafaring nations of the West that do not share our ideals, even though their own ideals are still in opposition to the official ideals that hold sway beyond the Iron Curtain. It is not by the literature of the sea as such at all events that any new bridge can be built between East and West; but that is only one side of our heritage. David Magarshack, writing of a great Russian playwright respected and loved and constantly played on both sides of the curtain, reminds us that in mutual admiration and study of the great figures of our two literatures there is still the best hope that minds shall not be altogether and catastrophically closed against one another; and friendly Russian participation in the celebration of Shakespeare's birthday at Stratford this year was the best complementary evidence from the other side. And yet this hope flourishes in a hard soil and a bitter climate; only the other day Dostoievsky fell into disfavour with the Kremlin (no new experience for him), and we are left wondering whether Chekhov will not follow him another day, and finally Shakespeare himself be engulfed in the same vortex of suspicion, misconception and power-hysteria.

JOHN LEHMANN

*Laurie Lee*

SUNKEN EVENING

---

The green light floods the city square –  
A sea of fowl and feathered fish  
Where squalls of rainbirds dive and splash  
And gusty sparrows chop the air.

Submerged, the prawn-blue pigeons feed  
In sandy grottoes round the Mall  
And crusted lobster-buses crawl  
Among the fountains' silver weed.

There, like a wreck, with mast and bell,  
The torn church settles by the bow,  
And phosphorescent starlings stow  
Their mussel-shells along the hull.

The oyster-poet, drowned but dry,  
Rolls a black pearl between his bones;  
The mermaid, trapped by telephones,  
Gazes in bubbles at the sky.

Till, with the dark, the shallows run  
And homeward surges tide and fret:  
The slow night trawls its heavy net  
And hauls the clerk to Surbiton.



*Louis Guilloux*

A MAN'S NAME

*Translated from the French*

---

He would say: 'Well, shall I go? Do you agree? Am I to go?' She would answer: 'Do as you like. You must decide that for yourself.' Once she had added: 'For nearly thirty years I have done all I could for you, but here I can do nothing more. If you think you ought to go, go!'

Their discussions almost always ended with those words. Once she had said: 'Go!' he would not answer any more, but would begin to ponder, now depressed, now nervous, sometimes even angry. Always the same thing! Always this 'Go'!

That was not what he expected of her.

One day she had promised never to do anything to prevent him from going, and he had thought that strange. Prevent him? How?

'Come now, Germaine ...'

She wasn't going to start following him in the street, to spy on him, was she? He asked no permission of her. He only wanted her to agree. But she did not. She left him free to decide, that was all.

All the same, she had never dared to say to him: 'You are free.' That would have been too cruel. He would have thought himself abandoned.

She always spoke to him in a calm tone. She was a woman who seldom lost her temper. Once, however, she had replied with a certain impatience: 'You managed quite well to decide for yourself in the beginning. You asked nobody's advice when you committed the theft ...'

But she had not insisted.

It sometimes happened that Germaine, at the end of their arguments, hid her face in her hands, and then he did



not know what to do, he felt rather ashamed of himself, he dared not look at her. He would begin to walk about the room, a nice clean dining-room with its Henri II sideboard, its salamander, its vases and cartridge shells on the mantelpiece, its gilt-framed mirror. He saw himself in the mirror. It was intolerable. What connexion was there between himself and that neat, puffy little man of sixty, whose image he saw, this small, ordinary, pink head, slightly bald, this face with its large blue eyes, the big grey whiskers? And the beard on his chin. Was that he, that little bourgeois of operetta fame? Was that what he had come to? How nauseating!

So as not to see himself in the mirror, he walked to the window. Also to avoid seeing Germaine. She was sitting by the table, her hands on her face, her two slim hands, old though still beautiful. He did not want to see Germaine's white hair. When she thus hid her face in her hands, and he only saw her white hair, she looked like a very old woman. But she was the woman he had loved, for thirty years ...

And that was what they were: an old childless couple, two little old pensioners, highly respected in the town. Was that all? He used to say to himself: 'This is what I have come to, after a whole lifetime. This is what we have come to together. And after she has loved me, saved me, I am asking this sacrifice of her. It is monstrous.'

But could he do otherwise?

— No, I cannot do otherwise, he would answer himself.

He knew well, however, that if he went there, they would send for her afterwards, for if he was guilty, she was his accomplice.

'If only she understood me! ...'

Who could ever understand him, if not she? That passer-by, picked at random, from among those he saw walk past on the pavement? He had none to ask for advice, and neither had Germaine. Because of the circumstances, in fact, they had broken off all relations with their respective families. They had no friends.

'Germaine?'

She lowered her hands, lifted towards him her beautiful tense face, her intelligent, tired eyes.

'Understand me, Germaine ...'

But she did not want to argue any more. She had had enough of this dialogue, which had lasted for months. Understand him? She understood, or at least pretended to. She proved it by telling him: 'Go.' However intertwined their destinies, she understood perfectly that here they could diverge. But she did not agree. She could not advise him to go. She left him free.

He said he could not 'die like that'. That was his great argument.

- Come now, Germaine, in my place ...

- Go if you want to.

- Ah! always, always the same thing!

And he, he knew perfectly well that he would not, could not go on living like that.

In vain had he, for months, been turning the problem over and over in his mind, the result of his thoughts had always been the same, he had to go.

But he would lose her, along with himself.

- Oh, I know, she has done everything for me. And I, what have I done for her?

He reckoned he had done almost nothing for Germaine, except to allow her to profit from all that stolen money. Could that be called having done anything for her? One could say, rather: against. He had dragged her, he had let her get entangled with him in this ... queer situation.

- We have been victims of circumstances. If ...

And then began the unending series of 'if'. Of course, if he had not committed the theft, if afterwards he had not met Germaine in that restaurant, if they had not fallen in love, and if he had had the courage to refuse her offer ...

That came to many 'ifs' ... There were still more, for example: if last winter I had not been ill, if, during that

illness, certain thoughts had not occurred to me, if I were not afraid to die ...

'You should understand, though, Germaine, that I cannot die like this.'

She had answered: 'Who speaks of dying? And even if it came to that, whether it be like this, or otherwise, what does it matter?'

'You don't understand me ...'

'And anyway, it is not at the end of thirty years one begins to own up. There are laws about that.'

As for that, that was another question, and he had also thought of that. They would suspect him perhaps of having waited so long on purpose, and he would have difficulty in proving his good faith. But he would give all the necessary facts, he would tell them about it in every detail and would offer to restore the sum.

They were not poor. Wisely, they had known how to manage their nest-egg, and how to make the most of it. Luck had always stood by them in their speculations. In spite of the changes in the value of money, they had grown considerably richer, having, for thirty years, led a tidy, modest life, an example of certain little bourgeois lives, idle in appearance, but in fact entirely governed by the fixed idea of profit. Returning the stolen money would not impoverish them much.

Besides, that side of the problem, important though it might be, remained of secondary importance. What he wanted, first of all, was to recover his name.

— My name, do you understand, Germaine, my real name.

The first time he had made this confession, Germaine had remained dumb with surprise. For all these years, there had been between them no more talk of this old business of names! He had got so well used to live under the name of Germaine's first husband. It was such luck that Germaine had just been widowed when they had met. They had loved each other right away, and he had not delayed telling her of this theft, of which they had both profited ever since.

Germaine had suggested going together to a town where they would be known to none, and where he would live under her dead husband's name.

He could still hear her: 'You see, I have all the necessary papers, and even the birth certificate.' And they had begun to laugh ...

He had accepted, they had gone off together, all had worked admirably well for thirty years. Why did he now want to spoil everything himself? She would have thought he had forgotten his lawful name.

'Your real name is not known to anyone now.'

But that was not the question! It was not because of that! Not only because of that!

'Under your real name, you have been dead for thirty years ...'

His futile little person had shuddered with a sort of sacred terror.

Germaine had added one day:

'And as you are not even French ...'

That day he had had something like an attack of nerves. He had begun to groan like a puppy when someone treads on its paw. Germaine had concluded from that that he was not his normal self, and that he would do something silly if not closely watched. Or, she asked herself, could he really not bear to go on living under her first husband's name? It was rather late to say so ...

With a few, hardly noticeable, variations, it had for months always been the same conversation between them, and in between the replies, or after she had told him 'go!' the same thoughts on both sides, the same way of hiding her face in her hands, and of looking out of the window.

His real name! What childishness! No, she did not understand him. No, surely he was not his usual self. Why did he, at all costs, want to recover his real name? He had never been jealous of her first husband, he had never shown enmity against him, and he had even appeared peacefully



happy to slip into the dead man's papers as into a warm garment. But then, what? Remorse?

'Perhaps.'

'You?'

'Perhaps,' he had repeated.

She had begun to laugh. It was difficult to believe. He had stolen eight hundred thousand francs, which had meant a considerable sum at the time, but he had stolen them from a bank.

'You know as well as I do that banks are protected against these sort of accidents. There is the insurance.'

And the suspicion had come to Germaine that he did not give his real reasons. Did he feel like seeking out what was left of his family? Did he want to leave his fortune to some great-nephew? Madness!

Go back to his country?

'Do you want to become Belgian again as badly as that?'

He had not replied, except to say that what was more, for thirty years he had been breaking the law about foreigners staying in France.

'Yes. And then?'

He had granted her that this did not have much importance.

'Germaine, it is not that I care so much to be in order in the eyes of the law, although I care for that very much, but what matters to me is what will happen afterwards.'

'After what? After you have gone there? After you have owned up everything to the police?'

'No,' he said, 'after I am dead.'

As he said that, he had begun to tremble from head to foot. The whole of his puffy little body trembled, his lips trembled under the white whiskers, and the small beard, he was pale, he looked as though he were going to be ill, his very eyelids quivered. He said in a sort of sigh:

'I want to die under my real name.'

'Why?' she had answered, taken in herself by the sort of idiocy of the question.

He had taken up this 'why' bitterly, as one takes up an insult.

'It seems to me that this is obvious, Germaine ... I don't want to. No, I don't want the people who will pass through the alley ...'

He had not finished his sentence. He was choking. Germaine was looking at him seriously, attentively. Was he in his right senses?

'What alley?' she had murmured.

With a gulp which was like a broken sob, he had said in the end:

'In the churchyard.'

A moment later he had added, almost soundlessly:

'It would seem to me as if I were buried alive.'

Then he had begun to tremble again, and he had cried and groaned:

'I don't want it. No! Germaine! They will read a name on the tombstone, and it will not be my real name! ...'

Afterwards, another day, calm again, he had explained to Germaine that for thirty years it had not mattered to him to walk about the streets under a false name, to be greeted by people by a name which was not his own. That was easy! The difficulty of it would begin at this alley.

'I think no one could bear that, Germaine!'

She had thought for a long time and then, after yet many days, she had said to him:

'Women haven't really a name of their own. They usually find it quite easy to get used to having their husband's name.'

Was that why she understood him so little? Was that all she had to say to him?

'You don't understand me, Germaine.'

'But I do.'

'No.'

'Why do you say I don't? You have only me left in the whole world. And since I, I shall know ...'

It seemed to Germaine that this should have sufficed to calm all his misgivings, but he had cried out:

‘It is under my real name that I want to appear before God!’

The little fellow had begun to shake again the moment he pronounced the word God. He had caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and hated himself as never before. An expression of amazing surprise had suddenly transformed Germaine’s beautiful face, and he had perceived there something like a mocking smile.

‘Let me be!’ he had cried out. And he had left the room to go and hide somewhere, throw himself on a bed.

She had told him afterwards:

‘It is not God who gave you your name!’

And did souls have to be named? Names, where did they come from? She had begun to explain to him, as to a child, that all names had, in the beginning, been nicknames. They did not come from God, but from men, often even from their malice, from the often ignorant good will of a registrar. A name, what was it? No more than a number on a door ... What childishness! And how could it be that he cared for it even to the extent of putting everything in the balance? ...

But why did he feel mad with horror at the thought that another name than his own would be engraved on his tombstone?

She told him:

‘Listen: no one has known our secret for thirty years. If you’re the first to go, nothing will be changed, since I will be here. No one will go to your grave but I. And therefore ... If I am to go first, you can then do as you please ...’

But he went on repeating that she did not understand him, and Germaine thought: he does not love me any more.

– She does not understand me, that means she does not love me any more, he said to himself. I am still waiting for her to say one word, but that word does not come. I cannot go there until I have convinced her. But the day she tells me:

'You cannot do otherwise and it is I who advise you to go and own up, and what is more, we shall go together, for if you are guilty, I am your accomplice,' that day everything would be perfect.

— But she will not say the word, because she does not love me any more.

People walked by in the street, all strangers. He turned round. Germaine was still resting her elbows on the table, her face behind her hands, her head bent, showing only her white hair.

He murmured:

'Germaine?'

She started, and he said:

'Well, shall I go? Do you agree? Am I to go? Say one word ...'

He waited, shivering, in suspense, not breathing, then he made a step forward and glimpsed in the mirror the grotesque little image of the old little fellow he was, and immediately looked away. Germaine's hands slid down her lovely tense face, she fixed upon him her beautiful, intelligent and tired gaze, and they remained thus, for a long moment, looking at each other, and he felt tears come to his eyes, his arms made a small movement as if to open ... 'Yes, she does love me, she is still the same Germaine. She loves me, she will say the word.' 'He still loves me, she thought, my God, I don't want to lose him ...'

'Well, Germaine?'

And he made another step forward ...

Germaine let her arms fall limply on the table. She nodded.

'What do you expect me to say to you? Do as you please. Go, if you want to.'



*Diana Witherby*

## ASLEEP, AWAKE

--

BETWEEN asleep, awake,  
 Lie the sun and moon,  
 The tropic and the ice,  
 The infant and the grave.  
 Some, awake, shake off their sleep  
 And move into the day,  
 Others, with open eyes, still live in  
 Their terrible dreams, split,  
 Like a separated firework  
 Of rocket silver star  
 And empty string-bound stick.

ASLEEP – beneath a dream –  
 A daughter hears the noise of thunder  
 Jungle and the gun and then,  
 Suddenly, a floating silence,  
 And flying with a coloured bird  
 For an endless moment lonely  
 In a sky which has no peace.

DAZED – just out of a dream –  
 Runs a hasty valet,  
 Galleries and palace rooms  
 Echo, halcyon, in mirrors,  
 His anxious lackey eyelids hide  
 His own image slowly tumbling  
 From a back balcony of life.

AWAKE – passionately loitering –  
A young man listens to the urgent  
Murmuring of purple air.  
Dusty, vast, the southern sundial  
Records desire, but burns up time,  
And cicadas sandy ticking  
Cannot move his olive hour.

*Frank O'Connôr*

## THE LANDLADY

---

Three of our chaps were lodging together at the end of the town in the house of a widow called Kent. They lived like rajahs, and in England during the war that was something to congratulate yourself on. I envied them; and I was far from being the worst off of the Irish crowd. After a fortnight in a dosshouse I managed to get lodgings in the house of an old coachman who had married the lady's maid in the Big House. They left when the owner got divorced. 'Of course, we couldn't stay after that,' said the old lady to me. I fancy she had a grievance against him for not staying married because herself and the old man never stopped talking about him. 'Of course, he wasn't English,' she said.

The other lodger was a poor devil of a Czech with a doll in the W.A.A.F.'s and about three sentences of English. I don't know what fun she got out of him, but English girls were great on foreigners. Every time there was a raid on he dressed and tramped up and down the room, and I declare to my God, I think he used to carry a suitcase. 'You can see he's not English,' said the landlady with a great air of resignation. (After that I never walked round myself except in my bare feet, but even then I don't think she looked on me as a proper Englishman.)

At last the Czech's doll got fed up with hearing the same three sentences the whole time, and when the old dame told me I saw by the look in her eye that something good was coming. 'Of course,' said I, 'he's not English, is he?' and she looked at me with a new respect. 'No, he isn't, is he?' she said, and after that she gave me tea after my dinner. It was extraordinary how far you could get with that one phrase. The fellows in the factory loved it.

Myself and the other three Irish lads used to meet every

night in a pub under the Castle and compare notes on our landladies. It was a nice old pub with harness badges all over the walls. They were always talking about how their landlady went on the tiles; up to Oxford or down to Brighton with a chap called Clements in the chemist's shop. She was blonde and pretty and as bold as brass. She had a little girl of five but that was no inconvenience to her. She explained it all to the lads too, just in case they mightn't understand; how she didn't believe in marriage and all she wanted was a good time, and even if Clements asked her to marry him, she didn't know whether she would or not.

'Oh, the woman is a cow,' Kenefick used to say. 'A nice-looking cow, but a cow just the same.'

Kenefick was a bit of a card. He was an insignificant little man with a battered old hat, tin specs and a small moustache. At the same time, like all small men he had a great opinion of himself. Normally he'd have to crane his neck to look at you, but when he wanted to be serious, he stuck his hands in his trousers pockets, put out his chest, buried his chin in it and looked at the floor yards away as though he was looking down at you. In a queer way I always had a great regard for Kenefick. In his own way he was a clever chap and as honest as they make them. I had a sneaking suspicion that he was connected with some political organization, but it was just as well his landlady didn't know that because she had a holy horror of one of the Irish chaps being found with bombs in her house. She was sure we all carried them.

Even about a little thing like that Kenefick and Mac couldn't agree. MacNamara thought that Kenefick was frightfully disillusioned. Mac was tall and thin and good-looking, with a slight cast in one eye, and though he came from some God-forsaken little place in West Cork, he put on an English accent and English airs, saying 'Old chap' and 'Old man' at every hand's turn. He was always trying to introduce himself into groups of G.I.'s and Tommies to explain to them that they mustn't confuse the Irish lower-classes who worked in the factories with educated Irishmen



like himself. That got on Kenefick's nerves, and he took occasion to make it clear that his mother was a washer-woman and his father a builder's labourer out of a job. 'Mac,' he said one night, 'is getting so grand he pronounces "Mass" as "church".'

And, of course, when they talked about their landlady Mac felt it was up to him as a man of the world to defend.

'But, my goodness, Stevie,' he said, sticking his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, 'isn't it the girl's own business? Damn it, old man, we'd all do the same if we got a chance.'

'Well,' said Kenefick glumly, 'what's stopping you?'

'Ah, but look here,' said Mac, refusing to be put down by what he called Kenefick's 'narrow-mindedness,' 'you're not pretending a little thing like that makes any difference?'

'I'm not pretending anything at all, Mac,' snarled Kenefick. 'I'm stating it as a fact. Merciful God,' he said with a sweep of his arm to indicate all the W.A.A.F.'s and A.T.S. in the pub, 'do you think girls like that are going back to scrub floors and bring up kids on ten bob a week?'

'But why should they?' asked Mac.

'No reason at all, Mac,' said Kenefick, 'only your old one did it.'

'Ah, but look here, Stevie, look here,' said Mac, pretending to be cut to the heart by Kenefick's old-fashioned ideas, 'you must admit that in marriage there are hard cases.'

'Hard cases?' said Kenefick with the eyes popping behind the tin specs. 'There's nothing else only hard cases. That's what I'm trying to knock into your thick head. There's no such thing as a happy marriage any more than there's such a thing as a happy family. All you can do is to make the best of what you have.'

'Still, Stevie,' said Long, beginning to stutter, 'there's marriages you can make nothing out of.'

Longie was the third of the gang, a country boy, supposed to be from somewhere in Limerick or Clare, though he

never told us precisely where. Like all country boys he never told you anything precisely, not knowing what use you might make of it.

'I'm not denying that either, Tim,' said Kenefick.

'But what are you going to do about them, man?' shouted Mac, as if he expected Kenefick to hand him a solution then and there.

'I'm not going to do anything at all about them,' said Kenefick. 'What do you think I am, a clinic or what?'

'But look here,' said Mac triumphantly, feeling that at last he had Kenefick in a corner, 'just suppose you're going with a doll.'

'There's no need to suppose anything,' said Kenefick, looking at the floor. 'I am.'

'I'm not referring to anyone in particular,' said Mac.

'What she doesn't know won't harm her,' said Kenefick.

'Well,' said Mac, full of concern for all poor suffering humanity, 'supposing – God between us and all harm! – you found out there was madness in her family?'

'That's for me to make sure of, Mac,' said Kenefick, looking at him sternly over the specs.

'You'd be sure of a lot if you were sure of that, Stevie,' said Long, shaking his head and looking away in the distance.

'You'd be sure of nothing if you married a doll that might walk out on you in the morning,' said Kenefick.

They got great value out of that landlady.

But then, all of a sudden, things took a nasty turn. Celia Kent and the chemist had some sort of row, and she stopped going away for week-ends with him. Kenefick, being a cold-blooded, realistic chap, couldn't refrain from pointing out to Mac that that was the way affairs like that always ended up, but by this time Mac was in such a state of illumination that even this didn't worry him. He said the fellow might have his own reasons.

But it stopped being a joke when Celia Kent said she was closing up the house and taking a job in a factory. As I say,

looking for digs in wartime was no joke. The town we were in was packed like a cattle-truck, and the only alternative was the place the factory was about three miles away. That was a terrible joint. Every night, wet or fine, it was a pleasure to me to jump on my bike and get away from it.

Kenefick offered to increase the rent, but Mrs Kent said it wouldn't be worth her while. For all her old gab she was cut up about whatever the fellow in the chemist's had done to her. That night when the three Irish lads came into the pub by the Castle they were nearly scratching one another's eyes out. I can't say I felt much sympathy for them. They never showed any for me.

'Well,' I said, 'maybe the next landlady ye get, ye won't be so critical.'

'But what the hell are we to do, lads?' said Mac, giving me a fishy look with his squint eye. 'This is getting frightfully serious.'

'There's nothing we can do, there's nothing we can do,' said Kenefick, jingling the coins in his trousers pockets and looking at the floor. You could see the man was hurt at the very suggestion that there was anything he hadn't thought of. 'Tisn't money she wants - ye saw that.'

'What does she want?' asked Mac.

'She wants a man,' said Kenefick glumly - and he didn't put it as nicely as that either. Kenefick believed in calling a spade a spade.

'Ye might kidnap Clements and make him marry her,' said I, but the three of them looked at me the way you'd look at a man who made a joke in a wakehouse.

'Well,' said Mac, half in joke and half in earnest, 'what's wrong with one of ourselves?'

'Couldn't be done, Mac,' said Kenefick, still studying the floor. 'We haven't the knack of that sort of thing.'

'Who was talking about that sort of thing?' asked Mac. 'What's wrong with the girl anyway?'

Kenefick raised his eyes slowly from the floor and took a good look at Mac to see if he was in his right mind.

'Are you suggesting one of us ought to marry her?' he said.

'No,' said Mac, having it put up to him like that. 'I only wanted to know what was wrong with her.'

Kenefick put back his head and laughed till the tears came to his eyes.

'Holy God!' he said. 'How is it none of us thought of that before?'

The very notion of it seemed to put them into good humour again.

'Well,' I said, 'Mac always had a great liking for this country.'

'Here, boys,' said Mac, beginning to giggle, 'do you think she would have me? I'm not a bad-looking chap, sure I'm not.'

'Damn fine-looking chap, Mac,' said Kenefick. 'Besides, she can always get rid of you.'

At that Mac let on to be deeply offended.

'What way is that to encourage a man?' he said indignantly. 'I'm only suggesting it for the good of the crowd.'

'But what matter, Mac?' said Kenefick. 'As you say yourself – a little thing like that!'

At the same time I was surprised. I saw that for all his larking Mac was more in earnest than he let on to be. He went off for a round of drinks and started blackguarding with the barmaid. I don't know what there is about a squint that women like, but Mac could be popular enough when the fancy took him.

'Here, lads,' he said, coming back with the drinks, 'we're forgetting the spokesman of the party. Stevie is the right man for this job, a fine, educated chap and all.'

'Anything to oblige, Mac,' said Kenefick, taking it in good part, 'but certain interested parties mightn't understand.'

'Good God!' said Mac, letting on to be staggered. 'Has anyone in this place any sense of responsibility? You



wouldn't mind doing a little thing like that for the sake of a friend, Jerry?' he said to me.

'I'd be delighted, Mac,' said I. 'Ye wouldn't have a spare bed?'

'What about Longie?' said Kenefick, sprawling against the counter and pulling the old hat down over his eyes. 'We all know he's from Limerick, and no one ever went back there that could avoid it.'

We were all entering nicely into the spirit of the thing when he said that. Longie didn't laugh.

'I think he'd be a lucky man that would get her, Stevie,' he said with a stammer.

'Think so, Tim?' asked Kenefick, getting serious too.

'We talk as if the woman ought to be honoured,' Longie said, raising his eyebrows into his hair. 'She's beyond us.' Then he shook his head as if he didn't know what was coming over the world and looked at his drink. 'Beyond us,' he said.

That was one of the longest connected statements we ever got out of Longie, so it cast a sort of gloom over the proceedings.

'You might be right, Tim,' said Kenefick.

'Would you marry her, Longie?' said Mac excitedly.

'I wouldn't have the chance, Mac.'

'But would you? Would you if you had?' repeated Mac.

'To tell you the truth, Mac,' said Longie in a low voice, 'I'd consider myself honoured.' Then he raised his brows, looked sadly at me as if I was the one who was responsible for all the levity, shook his head once or twice and repeated 'Honoured.'

'I'll make you a fair offer so,' said Mac. 'We'll toss for it.'

This time there was no larking about it. I could hardly credit it but Mac was in earnest. He wanted to marry that girl and settle down in that nice little house of hers, and be a respectable English husband, only he was afraid that the rest of us might think he was a fool. What he really wanted

from Longie was encouragement. Longie looked at him and gave a hearty laugh.

'Winning or losing wouldn't improve the chances of a fellow like me, Mac,' he said.

'All right, all right,' snapped Mac, getting impatient with his obtuseness. 'If one of us doesn't succeed the other can have a shot. But are you game?'

Longie gave a sort of lost look at him, at me, and then at Kenefick, as if he was asking himself what you could do with such a foolish man. Then he laughed again.

'I'm game,' he said.

'Come outside so and we'll toss,' said Mac. 'There's no time like the present.'

Kenefick leaned back against the counter with his arms stretched out, his legs wide and one of them cocked up against it – trying to make himself look twice the size. He looked at them like a judge, over the specs and under the brim of the old hat.

'Are ye in yeer right minds?' he asked.

'Never felt better, old man,' said Mac, tossing his head and rubbing his hands.

'Ye're not forgetting, by any chance, that the woman has a family already?' said Kenefick, looking from one to the other.

'Oh, as you're so fond of saying yourself,' said Mac with a laugh, '– a little thing like that!'

'Oh, just as ye like,' said Kenefick, and he finished his drink and went out into the yard after them. It was easy to see he was puzzled. The moonlight was coming in the back passage and a W.A.A.F. and her fellow were sitting there, holding hands. It looked grand out in the yard with the moonlight shining on the old tower of the church.

Kenefick took out a coin, looking very grave. That was where the man's height came in: he couldn't help taking advantage of any occasion that made him feel six foot two.

'Well, lads,' he said, 'what's it to be?'

'Harps,' said Mac.

Kenefick flicked the coin in the air and then stepped aside. He took out an old torch and flashed it on.

'Well, Mac,' he said, 'you seem to be out of this anyway. Our turn now, Tim!'

'You have nothing to do with this, Stevie,' said Longie after a moment, raising his big paw.

'Who said I had nothing to do with it?' Kenefick asked as if he was looking for a fight.

I tumbled at once to what he meant. He was leader of that gang, and he wasn't going to have them getting out of hand and doing cracked things on their own. It's extraordinary the way vanity takes small men.

'You have other responsibilities,' said Longie, and you could see he was troubled about it.

'Time enough to meet trouble when you come to it,' said Kenefick. Then he looked at me, threw back his head and brayed. 'Holy God!' he said. 'Look at Reilly's face! He thinks we're mad.'

'I know what my landlady would say about ye if she saw ye now,' I said.

'Well, call, man!' said Kenefick.

'Heads, Stevie,' said Longie.

Kenefick tossed again, and it came up harps.

'Well,' he said, turning on his heel, 'that settles it.'

'Yes,' said I, 'and if the girl saw ye 'twould settle ye as well.'

We had another drink, and then went home together up the Main Street, past the Castle and the old church. I was walking with Kenefick. I could see the man still didn't know what to make of it, or how serious the others were, or whether they were serious at all. I don't think he even quite knew what to make of himself, and that probably bothered him most.

'Well,' I said, 'I saw some queer things in my time, but I never before saw three men tossing for a doll. What the devil ailed Mac?'

'Ah,' said Kenefick, 'fellows like him are kept down too

much at home. The Yanks are the same. Some of them take it out in drink and more in women. I suppose 'tis only natural.'

'It looked more like hysterics to me,' said I.

He gave a lonesome sort of laugh out of him at that.

'There might be something in that too,' he said.

But he was right about one thing. From the time Longie and the Kent woman started knocking round together, there was no more talk about breaking up the happy home. The thing was a mystery to me for the man had no conversation, but after the Czech and his W.A.A.F. I said it couldn't last.

'Sure, of course it won't last, man,' said Mac with a superior smile.

'I don't know,' said Kenefick. 'I wouldn't be too sure of that. Longie is an interesting fellow. He has a mind of his own.'

'What mind?' said Mac. 'Is it a half idiot of a country boy?'

Kenefick said nothing to that, but when Mac went out the back, he threw back his head and bawled.

'Holy God, Jerry,' he said. 'He's jealous.'

Mind you, I didn't believe him, but he was right. Celia Kent was the sort of woman that when she likes a man always wants to give him things, and from the time she started going out with Longie, she was giving him pullovers and scarves and slippers, and all sorts of things poor Longie didn't want and didn't know what to do with, but it drove Mac wild. He said he was paying as much as Longie and he was entitled to the same treatment. One night when Longie got two rashers of bacon instead of one, he didn't talk until supper was over, then he took his hat and went over to Belmore on the bus and arranged to share with a couple of other fellows there. The same night Kenefick came belting up to my place and I gave notice. I didn't mind how many rashers Longie got so long as I got something to eat.

I was there for the wedding in the Town Hall. I was there

too a couple of months after when two bobbies called at the factory and marched Longie off. It seems all the time he had a wife and a house full of kids at home in Clare. Neither Kenefick nor myself heard of it till after, and he called for me to go to the barrack with him. To give the man his due he was very upset.

‘Oh, I might have guessed it, I might have guessed it,’ he said, as if it was a miracle to him that he didn’t foresee it all. ‘And, merciful God,’ he said, throwing out his arms like windmills and rolling his eyes to Heaven, ‘can’t you imagine what the wife and kids are like?’

I could; only too well. A poor devil of a country boy, married at eighteen, and knowing no more of life than a city kid, what chance has he?

When we got to the barrack Long was after being released, and Kenefick said we should cycle back home and tell the Kent girl. It was a spring day with high clouds and a high wind, and there was Kenefick, bent over the handle-bars, shouting about Long.

‘What the hell did he want to marry her at all for?’ he said. ‘Couldn’t he tell the girl the truth and go and live with her like anyone else?’

‘Ah,’ said I, ‘he had too much respect for her.’

‘Respect?’ said Kenefick. ‘What sort of respect is that? Couldn’t he leave her to Mac?’

‘Maybe he liked the girl himself,’ said I.

‘He took a damn queer way of showing it,’ said Kenefick.

When Celia heard us she came running out, rubbing her hands in her white coat. Kenefick put on a solemn air, drawing his shoulders up round his scraggy neck; till all he wanted was the black tie.

‘Anything wrong, Stevie?’ she said in holy terror.

‘I’m afraid so, Celia,’ he said, clearing his throat. ‘Longie’s after being arrested.’

‘Arrested?’ she said, getting pale. ‘What was it? Something political?’

‘Worse than that,’ said Kenefick, who didn’t see her point



of view about bombs at all. 'It seems he's married already.'

'Tim?' she said. 'Tim married? But why didn't he tell me?'

'Why didn't he tell me?' said Kenefick, with his eyes beginning to pop, implying that this was the sort of thing that always happened when people wouldn't ask his advice. 'I could have told him he wouldn't get away with it.'

'What will they do to him?' she asked.

'God knows,' said Kenefick glumly. 'He's released now of course. He might get six months.'

'Released?' she said. 'But where is he?'

'Walking mad, I suppose,' said Kenefick with a toss of his head. Then he gave her a sharp look. 'You know, of course, that none of us had any idea more than yourself.'

'Oh,' she said with a shrug, 'I don't mind. There's no harm done. I was a fool to take it seriously, that's all. If he'd trusted me I should have behaved just the same.'

'Jerry is probably right,' said Kenefick. 'He says Longie thought too much of you.'

'Do you think so really?' she said to me, but all the same she flushed up. It was the same as the presents. Any little compliment, no matter how silly it was, gave her pleasure. 'Well, it sounds just dotty to me, but if you say so I suppose I'd better go and look for him.'

When we got out in the road, Kenefick lifted the front wheels of his bike and brought them down with a wallop on the road.

'And to think I might be married to that girl!' he said.

It sounded very queer coming from Kenefick, after all he said about her.

'Well,' I said, 'you could still, if it came to that.'

'That one would go into the river after someone she liked,' said Kenefick.

She wouldn't, and I was very surprised to hear a level-headed fellow like Kenefick suggesting it, but it showed me the way the wind was blowing. That evening when neither Longie nor Celia put in an appearance, I almost began to

believe the man was right about that too. We made our own supper, went up to the pub, and then dossed down. It was late when the other pair came in. They had an argument about whether or not Longie was going to have his supper, and, judging by the noises, she won. Then she brought us up cups of tea. Kenefick was lying with a book on his knee and one arm under his head, and he looked at her over the specs.

‘So you found him?’ he muttered.

‘Yes,’ she whispered. ‘In Belmore, looking for lodgings! Of all the dotty bastards! Just fancy! He said his luck was out. ‘It’s not your luck,’ I said. ‘It’s just that you’re dotty.’ Then she laughed, swaying on her heels with her hands behind her back. ‘Of all the silly things to do to someone you say you like! That fellow’s barmy! Just barmy! He says he wants to come back, and now I suppose I shall have to keep going somehow till he comes out of gaol. Fancy me with a bloke in gaol! That old cat, Mrs Drake, won’t half be hopping.’

Then they came up to bed, and for hours they continued talking. She seemed to be speaking pretty sharp to him. I suppose girls like that can nag, just like others. Then the sirens began, and the wailing drifted away across the country, like a bloody big banshee, wringing her hands.

‘I was the one that should have married her,’ says Kenefick all of a sudden out of the darkness.

I knew what he meant all right. I felt a little bit that way myself. He was the most independent of them. It was just as if some row he was having inside himself was settled, and he wasn’t a foreigner any more. Of course, Mac wouldn’t have agreed with that at all, but then Mac would never be anything only a foreigner. As my old landlady said ‘You could see he wasn’t English.’

*Harry Duncan*

## EAST ROCK: 1942

Though shadows lined the rusty, sun-paled rocks,  
 Our fathers long ago had scared away  
 All bears and Indians from the trail they blazed:  
 No peril seemed that lax forenoon as we  
 Climbed the rock, examined initials, gazed  
 Abroad; sightseeing flocks  
 Had gone before to build the fence and paint  
 Warnings of DANGEROUS HEIGHT, fearing falling  
 Could follow so steep a downward look, feeling  
 Heady toward heaven where world spreads far and faint.

Behind: the trees were tufted sprigs with black  
 Ink spattered under them, the cars were ants,  
 The wry creek a crack in porcelain park;  
 And Lilliputian from our eminence,  
 As geometric as toy Noah's ark  
 And nice as bric-à-brac,  
 The city stretched and thrust up ankle-high  
 Its enterprise above the learned town  
 Whose gothic spires' nostalgia would atone  
 No longer, splintered from its reach of sky.

We'd left two long drinks on a shady porch  
 To stun our eyes with sun drinking the bay  
 Quicksilvered brim to brim immense and bent,  
 Though no more anxious Puritans would see  
 A ghost-sail there. We went where stunted plants  
 Undid their leaves to scorch;  
 Only one pine, sparse hair and twisted bone,  
 Endured the niggard rock and naked weather,  
 Lashing itself from adamant to ether  
 Starved wing by a monster claw outgrown.

Why had we come? Although it had been you  
Suggested casually we take the climb  
And we had hardly stopped our conversation,  
Got up, and gone, a part of me ran some-  
Where up ahead to ferret out a vision,  
Wishing the farther view  
Might raise a glittering grail to startled hands  
Or a bush burn. Maybe it was the drink  
And walking in the sun that made me think  
Life might be caught where our hold on it ends.

'Pure light and farness, flood and fuse the pieces  
Scattered about us to a single mirror  
And give us back our severing image clearly.'  
Radio-towers needled in the air.  
A bird shrieked once and then kept silence. 'Surely  
All pursuit here ceases,'  
For we had reached the country's very term.  
You leaned against a crevice traced with sun  
Smiling at me, and the light hard upon  
The sweat-flecked khaki of your uniform.

Due east lay Europe, Asia dark beyond;  
And the breeze idly playing through your hair  
Was in that east, bomb-blasted yesterday  
Perhaps, though now the faintest, gentlest air  
From crossing neutral sea so long a way.  
Then into it I turned,  
Into the vague ring of water and sky,  
'Let nothing hold, all plunges down, all shatters  
For no good reason, nothing really matters,'  
Leaning out to the sun like a blind eye.

That was the only further thing to see,  
The steep road having ended on sheer rock.  
You simply took my sleeve and brought me round  
Till I could again see in turning back  
My own darkness wavering on the ground.

And you looked straight at me  
Still smiling, then turned too. We started down  
Together, though there'd been no other sign,  
Past the initials, the warnings, and the pine.  
As we went down, our backs were to the sun.

The sun at our backs coloured all the land.  
We went down watching houses, trees, and cars  
Slowly grow larger than ourselves until  
They took us in. When we looked up, of course  
East Rock was just a high red-purple hill  
Plumed with a pine-branch and  
No more the claw-clutched verge of that we knew.  
'In distance, revelation.' Which was all,  
For we were hungry, dazed with alchohol  
And the hot sunlight. We had had the view.



*Anna Kavan*

## THE RED DOGS

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Exactly a year ago to-day the first red dogs made their appearance in this country. How short people's memories are! A year doesn't seem long to remember such a momentous happening: yet no one so much as acknowledges the anniversary. Of course I don't suppose everyone has really forgotten the significance of the date; most likely they've decided to keep it quiet. And that sort of supineness makes one inclined to despair. What a rare thing human integrity is – how few and far between are the individuals who possess it! Humans on the whole aren't much more stable than weathercocks, changing with every fresh wind.

If one recalls the passionate outcry that went up when the presence of the red dogs in our homeland was confirmed for the first time, it seems incredible that the violent storm could have subsided in twelve brief months into mute acquiescence. To begin with, twelve years would not have been deemed long enough to bring about such a volte-face. This time last year, I doubt whether a soul could have been found who wouldn't have felt outraged by the idea of relaxing before the last red dog was hunted out of existence. To hint that so-and-so tolerated the invaders would have been construed then as a mortal affront. Yet here are the protagonists of last year's burning protest tamely resigning themselves to the visitation, out of prudent respect for their material welfare. At this rate it won't be long before the coming of the red dogs will be not merely accepted but positively acclaimed – we may well be celebrating the anniversary next year, instead of keeping it dark!

Should the human race ever achieve sanity, how future generations will puzzle over the fluctuations symptomatic of our sick, crazy epoch! What a legacy of confusion we are

handing down to any rational being who later on tries to discover a coherent design in the scrawled pages of our aberrant conduct!

‘But how is it possible’, one imagines such a researcher crying out in despair, ‘for a fundamental mass change in public opinion to take place so inexplicably, so unobtrusively, and in such a short space of time? First there’s intense resistance to the red dogs, linked with horror, disgust; then an abrupt silence, full-stop to the struggle; and immediately afterwards comes assent, with approbation upon its heels; and the once-execrated state of affairs stands magically established, as if a conjuring trick had been performed – consolidated, as though by the backing of centuries of tradition.’

Well, I can’t supply any learned theories as to how or why these things happened. I don’t propose to criticize or to attempt an analysis of matters I don’t properly comprehend. All I can do with my observer’s training is to note down some of my own impressions, quite simply and briefly, as I’ve been accustomed to do in keeping the records, and as I’m doing now. Perhaps an inquiring mind, unshaped as yet, may be stimulated by curiosity to read what I’ve written. I like to think so, at any rate. It pleases me to think that a descendant of mine (living in those better days we’re always told lie just round the corner), will be helped by my notes to understand the chaotic maze through which his ancestors had to grope, and to judge us more leniently in consequence.

How shall I begin my observations on the red dogs, after this preamble? It’s hard to know where to start for, strangely enough, I can’t recollect exactly how or when I first got to hear that there were any such creatures. Others have told me that they too feel a similar vagueness about the preliminary stages of the invasion. Knowledge of the red dogs seemed to steal into our minds in the same stealthy way that the beasts themselves penetrated and possessed the territories of the globe.

When I think of the beginning I think of voices. There was a day I woke to an atmosphere of whispering – that's one point which I do recall. Not that it happened abruptly like that, as I've written it. The whispers must have been there, growing louder and stronger for a long while before they forced themselves on my notice; and long afterwards they continued to grow without arousing any special reaction.

Long before their actual coming – for well over a year, I should say – rumours about the red dogs filled the air: rumours which spread mysteriously from one country to another; jumped from island to island; ran from village to town. Why we weren't warned – why we didn't pay more attention – these are the sort of questions I cannot answer. The whispers seemed innocuous at first. We, in our distant province, are outside the general current of gossip that's going about, and rumours coming to us from far off never seem very real. We listen to the tall stories that strangers tell us; we marvel; and then forget them. Such travellers' tales as eventually reach our shores make scarcely more impression than spray from the waves which have been thundering there since time began.

The rumours, then, in the first place, not only seemed unconvincing, but trivial too. To me, there was something downright silly about them. I'm as fond of animals as anyone else, and of dogs in particular; but my interest doesn't extend to listening to gossip about some new foreign breed. Haven't we got enough queer-looking dogs in the world already? Breeders are forever experimenting with the poor brutes, trying to produce some monstrosity with a sky-blue tail, or with feathers instead of hair.

That's how unimportant the whispers seemed to begin with: believe me or not, they seemed as foolish as that. The one peculiarity of the rumour – or, I ought to say, the thing which struck me as odd – was its persistence. Again and again it seemed to be fading out; for weeks on end there was silence, as if it had died a natural death in the usual way. Then, just as the whole rigmarole was almost

forgotten, sure as fate it would turn up again somewhere, in a slightly different form.

The animal concerned wasn't always a dog, though it generally did belong to the canine breed. Sometimes the story centred around a wolf, or a jackal, or a coyote. The creature was described in many extravagant ways, rumour-mongers supplying the details to suit themselves or their hearers. But a rather surprising consistency was preserved on two points: the beast was always a queer colour, and it was always ferocious.

My own opinion (when it became impossible to ignore the tale any longer) was an epidemic must have broken out among the dog population; perhaps an especially virulent form of distemper, which turned its victims into those moody killers we hear of from time to time. This, by the way, was later adopted as the official theory; compulsory inoculation of all dogs being enforced – with the net result that a lot of money went into the pockets of the chemists who made the serum, and of the vets whose job it was to give the injections. But the step wasn't taken till it was too late to do any good; even supposing that immunization could ever have been in the least effective.

Anyone looking back from a distance, surely must be staggered by the procrastination and lack of initiative the authorities here displayed. They had ample notice of danger; plenty of time to discover an antidote to the plague by which less isolated places were surprised and poisoned before realizing the deadly nature of the infection that threatened them. We were forewarned; why were we not forearmed? Were our officials blind, negligent, incapable, misinformed? Or were they corrupt, and guilty of a positive breach of trust?

But I have no right to set myself up in judgement, nor do I wish to do so. Standing too near the event, perspective becomes falsified, and much information still remains inaccessible. Only the future can give an impartial verdict, when all the facts have been made fully known. Who am I

to blame others for being slow in the uptake when I, with my special qualifications, took so long to see what was coming? One has to be extra sensitive for my type of work – to turn oneself into a negative for recording impressions – so that I'm generally one of the first to feel whatever is in the air. Yet I was as dense as everyone else where the red dogs are concerned.

Thinking things over, I've come to the conclusion that we must have been subjected to a distorting alien influence at that time. It was as if we were all slightly light-headed; as if, with each breath, we drew into ourselves some sort of gas which interfered with our perceptions and caused us to act in an abnormal way. Not only human beings behaved strangely; corresponding irregularities appeared throughout the natural kingdom; animals, clouds, even roads and stones, deviating erratically from their habitual forms. I originally used the word 'influence' to express the idea that we were affected by some unknown cosmic force completely outside our sphere of control. But after all, what's more likely than that man himself, in his reckless experiments with the universe, may have accidentally loosed the principle of disorder? It certainly looks as if an anarchic tendency, no matter what its source may have been, was working towards a general disorganization: disturbing the unity which gave shapes their meaning, so that warped patterns ceased to adhere to their centres, and fell apart. Such widespread derangement can't occur without reason. Just as a certain morbid state has to exist before the proliferation of body cells forms a cancer, so a disruptive impulse must have been present in nature, stimulating the growth of those freaks and deformities of which the red dogs are the extreme example.

I happened to be at work on meteorological records when whispered news of the creatures was coming through. The weather turned as crazy as everything else at that time, and I couldn't have helped observing its vagaries, even if it hadn't been a part of my job to do so. Our climate is never



exactly genial; winters are apt to be hard and long, and warm spells shorter than they are sweet. A late spring astonishes nobody here, although we shiver and grumble. But last year's spring never arrived at all.

Stark trees, looking as if they'd forgotten how to put forth a leaf, still lined the bus route by which I travelled to my work when midsummer was in sight. The bus ran through the suburbs for a part of the trip, and one of my outstanding recollections is the pleasant shock of seeing some lilacs in a sheltered suburban garden at last beginning to flower. When I looked out for the blossom next day it had gone. Naturally, I guessed the flower-sprays had been cut for a decoration: not for some seconds did I identify the sad shrubs, already moribund and shrouded in limp drooping leaves, plumed by a weird soot-black inflorescence which the frost had charred as effectively as a bomb.

On the whole, it was a relief when this bogus summer gave place to a month better suited (by association, at least) to the prevailing atmospheric conditions. The red dog rumour in all its infinite variety was now in full swing. Yet I remember a queer liveliness in the air as autumn came on: a feeling I can only compare with the undertone of excitement in a school near the end of term. People hung up their heavy coats – they'd never dared to discard them since the previous winter – in more prominent places – I was about to write 'in the place of honour'. The gesture was defiant, as if they were betting against the weather; and the weather forthwith accepted the challenge, determined to prove how wrong anyone was who thought its repertoire of tricks was exhausted.

At the time when days shorten and leaves are supposed to fall, the sun began to shine with unseemly ardour. The overcoat-owners smiled, telling each other that the heat was a flash-in-the-pan which couldn't possibly last. But day followed day without any sign of change; temperatures became stabilized at a high level; the unnatural heat-wave went on.

Once they'd got over their first surprise, most people, characteristically thoughtless, took the unseasonable sunshine for granted. In a better-late-than-never spirit they banished their heavy clothes and switched to a summer programme. Everyone with any spare time dashed for the open air. Overnight we became a town of sun-worshippers. Every garden and park was crammed from an early hour with crowds who seemed to have nothing to do but loaf and chatter and stare at the passers-by.

When I'd begun to suspect we were moving towards a disaster, I used almost to envy the idlers I saw on my way to work, sunning themselves any- and everywhere; in churchyards, on the roofs and the steps of buildings, wherever they could find a scrap of room to sit down. There they lounged, in unconventional attire, girls wearing next to nothing, even minor officials stripped to their shirt-sleeves, oblivious of all but the immediate present. Eye-shades and dark glasses can only have symbolized holiday time to those who sported them. I don't know how many wearers realized that their dazzled eyes were caused by the low winter arcs the sun was describing; at any rate, they all appeared totally unconcerned.

There were days when I could have found it in my heart to emulate those irresponsible holiday-makers; when I'd have gladly exchanged my duties and preoccupations for the carefree outlook enabling them to behave as if nothing in the whole world mattered more than their gossip.

Important their gossip may have been with a vengeance, in the sense that rumour couldn't have found a better nursery in which to breed. And who knows that the aura of collective credulity, rising from the town as mists smoke up from the marshes, may not in an obscure way have helped to prepare the ground from which the red dogs themselves were soon to emerge? I refer, of course, to the psychological, not to the concrete, ground: but the dual application of the word is significant. Does that sound superstitious? At the risk of being thought something worse, I must ask anyone

who has the patience to read these pages to set down the word 'dog' in mirror-writing, and then to remember how those whom the gods wish to destroy are proverbially first driven mad. The gods by whom we were maddened were, so to speak, in reverse; but they no less competently achieved our downfall. As I've said, we were already well on the road to disintegration; and the untimely heat of the sun streaming down day after day was exactly what was required to complete our ruin. Unfortunately for us, early pathological signs were limited to the restless excitement I've called liveliness. Had the course of our deterioration been more spectacular, we might have been moved to take prophylactic measures. But I must try to keep to the point and describe things in some kind of order.

Throughout the heatwave, the morning sky dawned quite clear: but tall upright clouds, of a type never seen before in our latitudes, used to collect about noon, stationing themselves in the zenith well above the sun's orbit, where they remained, motionless, erect and portentous, till darkness hid them from sight.

It was gratifying, of course, that the task of observing this important celestial phenomenon had been given to me. But perhaps I appreciated the appointment less than I should have done, because the extraordinary interest I felt in the clouds seemed almost to entitle me to it. It was really something much stronger than interest that I felt in them from the first; fascination would be a more appropriate word. Long before midday I used to find myself glancing up at the sky to see if they'd begun to materialize — though, as a matter of fact, they always seemed to mould themselves instantaneously out of the empty air, so that I was never able to watch the process of their formation. My feeling bordered upon the obsessional, I suppose: but I didn't realize it was being noticed by other people till a certain day when I was a little late in starting for work, and the bus ride to the observatory seemed unusually long.

I distinctly recall the impatience I felt on the journey, how I couldn't sit still, but kept twisting and turning to look out of the windows, eventually leaving my seat to stand on the platform outside where there was a wider range of vision. The clouds had not appeared. But all at once I became aware of the conductress staring at me with such fixed intentness that I felt obliged to explain what I was looking for, as she evidently expected me to say something. All she did was to order me off the platform. (I'd forgotten the byelaw forbidding people to stand there.) But the queer phrases she used impressed themselves on my mind. Was it solicitude or disapproval which made her expression so oddly set and her voice so earnest, as she motioned me back to my seat, at the same time urging me to take care? 'You can't be too careful with clouds,' was the way she put it. 'You never know where you are with clouds. They sometimes lead people on.'

Certainly I'd always found these particular clouds somewhat eerie. It was disquieting to observe their serene majestic aloofness, as they looked down on the sun, which, being tied to its lowly course, could neither approach them nor dissipate them with its beams. On this special day I noticed as soon as I entered the glass observation room that the cloud shapes had something unusually awe-inspiring about them; a solemn symbolic quality I can express no better than I can describe the feelings which they aroused. Apart from vague general terms like metaphysical, super-normal and so on, there don't seem to be any words for the sensation by which I was wholly possessed as I gazed up through the dome. When I try to find a comparison, I recall automatically the look of dread I once saw on the face of a man struck down by a heart attack in my presence. When he had recovered the sufferer told me that, far worse than the pain of the seizure, was the sense of imminent dissolution accompanying it. I believe there was a similar element in what I experienced that afternoon; though mine was not so much the fear of death (which is normal, insofar as nature has

implanted it in each one of us), as terror inspired by an extra-normal concept of being changed into a different life form. Try to imagine how much more ghastly than loss of life in the accepted sense would be transmutation to a type of existence absolutely unknown. Such a change is almost too appalling to contemplate, involving the loss of contact, communication, memory, hope, trust, dreams; everything, in fact, which supports the individual in the enormous void – all that mitigates the frightful solitude which is being.

Suddenly this unthinkable loss became possible; and no sooner possible than unavoidable – save by an alternative hardly to be preferred. It was as if the universe itself had suddenly lost its reason. As if the glass dome overhead opened on boundless nothing, where dead stones without end hurtled and howled in ceaseless, senseless flight. Of this idiot nothingness, divorced from my known self, I must become a part; or else set out, isolated and lost, upon a search of which I could not see the end.

This was the choice presented to me by the revelation I saw in the clouds: though, indeed, the question of choice never really arose, so clear was the issue from the beginning. Even at the original moment of shock, I knew that I was conclusively implicated, dedicated once and for all to the tremendous task, as if King's Messengers had arrived with orders addressed to me personally. But these cloud envoys were kings in their own right.

I've gone into all this in some detail, hoping to make myself understood; without, I'm afraid, being very successful. How is one to convey an impression of something which can't be objectified satisfactorily, and is hardly comprehensible to the subject? I'd better pass on, just saying that all sense of time and reality disappeared while I was in the observatory that afternoon. It always got very hot in there with the sun beating down on the glass, and possibly I was partly dazed for a while.

Anyhow, there's a blank; and the next thing I remember



is feeling the sweat turn cold on my flesh as I stepped into the open air.

For a moment I couldn't think which door I had just closed behind me, or where I was. Everything looked unfamiliar until I realized it was only dusk making the grass slope outside the observatory seem strangely large, and brightening the white stones at the edge as with phosphorescence.

There was hardly enough light left to see my watch; but I managed to make out that I'd still be able to catch the last bus with a few minutes to spare. The observatory, I must explain, is in the hills at the back of the town where the air is supposed to be clearer. It isn't very far out; but the road is rough and steep, and I didn't feel like walking so late in the evening. However, I decided to start off and let the bus overtake me. It was chilly standing about, for autumn asserted its rights these days by producing a rapid fall in the temperature as soon as the sun went down.

Fifty yards or so from the gates, the road made a hairpin bend and then dropped sharply, so that the observatory was soon out of sight. I might have been miles from anywhere then. It was hard to believe that suburban streets began just over the hill; they were hidden from where I was so completely that not a solitary light appeared anywhere as dusk deepened to darkness.

When I got to the foot of the hill I stopped, wondering why the bus hadn't caught up with me. During the last few minutes I'd been listening half-consciously for the engine. But the sound of my footsteps died away into unbroken silence, the stillness they had disturbed settled down again with the finality of a last curtain. Now it was much too dark for me to see the time: but I had the idea I'd been on the move considerably longer than I should have been if the bus had kept to its schedule. Why was it running late? The last bus on this route – mainly used by workers from the observatory and the inhabitants of the hilltop village beyond – is invariably punctual. The bad road makes the

journey unpopular after dark, and drivers are always in a great hurry to get back to the town. Could there have been a breakdown this evening? Was my watch slow? Or did I mistake the position of the hands when I looked at it? I told myself there was no sense in worrying; either the bus would come (and there'd be nothing to worry about), or it wouldn't – in which case I'd have to make the best of a bad job and walk all the way home. But somehow I couldn't get rid of a vague anxiety as I walked on up the next slope.

The night seemed exceptionally dark: but it wouldn't have been a pleasant walk even by day. The road was a mass of potholes and loose stones, into and over which I was bound to trip; and though I began by thinking it was lucky there were no roadside ditches which might have caused a bad fall, the lack of them made it hard to tell the road from the open country. Soon I wished there was some sort of boundary in spite of the risk of falling; I was afraid of wandering onto the hillside and getting completely lost. The road surface must have been rough indeed; for I didn't realize I had actually gone astray until I found myself blundering among boulders and briars and rank weeds.

Finding I really and truly had lost my way on the hills gave me a nasty jar; it made me realize too how easily one might lose one's head in a predicament of this kind. All sorts of forgotten tales recurred to me from the past, about travellers roaming in circles for days on end, and lost children starving to death in the woods. I had to remind myself, as I groped and stumbled about, that I was between the town and the observatory and no great distance from either. But even so there was a point where I felt as utterly, hopelessly, lost as I could have done in the remotest desert – when I almost despaired of emerging from the sightless nightmare of rocks which bruised me and barked my shins, and brambles which tugged painfully at my hair and did their utmost to scratch my eyes out.

When the feeling of more level ground told me that I'd

at last got my feet on the beaten track, I was so exhausted and shaky that the first thing I did was to sit down on a tree stump with which I'd collided the previous instant. I was too tired even to think; but as soon as I'd got my breath and recovered a little, I began wondering how much time I'd wasted in my wanderings, and what my chances were of getting home before dawn. Dreamlike adventures, as I knew very well, often seemed deceptively long: and though I felt that the night had already lasted an age, I was quite prepared to believe it might still be early.

Now, when I started off again, I hardly dared put one foot in front of the other for fear of getting lost for a second time. I was wishing the night were warmer – thinking it would be better to sleep under a bush than to keep on at this snail's pace – when I noticed the sky getting brighter, and realized that the moon must have risen behind the clouds. There was not enough light to illuminate things distinctly or in any detail. Only the black hills showed their outline, with blacker shadows of rocks and bushes upon them like crouching forms.

Anyone with any imagination who has walked alone, at night, on a lonely road, must be acquainted with the chill I felt then, touching my skin like a snake. Every child, every dreamer, has known at some time that cold breath which comes quite suddenly out of nowhere – blown back from ancient chaos perhaps; the wind of the unmade worlds. Whatever nameless prototype of alarm haunts the edges of consciousness came very close to me there on the hills while the moon was climbing into the covered sky. Gradually the diffused light was becoming stronger; but instead of clarifying my situation its effect was just the reverse. Much more than the contour of the land was visible now – I could actually see where I was walking. But never in my whole life have I felt more confused, more astounded, than I did then as I stopped dead and stood staring round – I daresay rather wildly.

Was I really asleep and dreaming the scene before me? I

shut my eyes hard and waited: but when I looked again it was still at the same strange landscape. Instead of the easy rolling hills which form the town's background, I now saw a vast chaotic mountainous vista, tumbling away to infinity like a turbulent sea. It was as if in a fit of maniac excitement the land had turned spendthrift, madly piling range upon range: while by the same token the road had become parsimonious, shrinking itself to the insignificance of a mule track. Not so much as one familiar rock appeared anywhere in the unruly perspective of crags and gorges, which my eyes went on searching of their own accord for some recognizable landmark.

The measured increasing of light quickened; and I saw that I wasn't far from a towering crest above which the moon at this moment moved ahead of the clouds, standing in front of the wedge-shaped cloud trail in the attitude of a figure-head or a leader, precise and hard. And suddenly there was a woman running along the hilltop; I saw her loose hair wild as cloud and as long as a river, streaming back in the clouds over the hill; so that she became the small chiselled shape shearing the wind, and all the wake of cloud streamed back from her as she ran.

She seemed to be calling out; or perhaps just screaming, for I failed to catch any articulate words. I shouted in what was intended for reassurance, leaving the loops of the graded path, as I started clambering up directly to where she was. For a second I saw her poised there above, on the verge of stillness, balanced with bent head, looking down for me: and the word 'dogs' was in the sharp rain of sound that came cascading about my ears like a shower of stones. Then she raised her head, and ran on, and vanished behind the great standing stones of the tor.

I went on climbing the rocky bluff, with the general idea that I might be able to help, but with no notion what form of help was likely to be required. I hadn't much time to consider the question either; for, even with the moon lighting up pitfalls and obstacles, the ascent was a stiff one,

and I knew that I had little chance of catching up with the woman unless she stopped running. She'd probably be out of sight by the time I got to the summit: and supposing I could still see her, how was I going to overtake her in this wild, rough country where I was completely astray? It suddenly occurred to me that to slip among these rocks and ravines would be the easiest thing in the world; to continue the chase was simply asking for a broken arm, leg or ankle: and yet I never thought of giving it up.

I just kept blindly on, trying not to reflect on the serious consequences which might result from an accident in such a lonely region. I had to concentrate on each step, I hardly so much as looked where I was going, and it took me quite by surprise to find that I'd reached the grouped rocks which had suggested a primitive monolith from below, but which seemed at close quarters a great deal more impressive and regal than any symbol constructed by human hands that I'd ever seen. It was impossible not to feel awed by these mighty columns which the Creator himself might well have set in place to uphold the sky. I almost forgot, as I looked at them, what had brought me to the spot: and when I did turn to the vista beyond, no long-haired wraith was in flight there. Far more disconcerting than anything I expected to see in that abominable wasteland, was what I took to be the apparition of a lighted vessel, frozen among cataleptic breakers of stone. I stared at it dumbfounded; not recognizing – till the moon struck a glacial sparkle from its superstructure – the very dome beneath which I'd recently been at work.

No wonder I thought for a second that I was suffering from an optical delusion of some sort! No wonder I felt confused! How could I be looking *down* on the observatory, I asked myself, when I'd left the place behind long ago, far above me? I was too tired and preoccupied to grasp for a moment that I'd been walking away from my destination instead of towards it, ever since losing my way out on the hillside.



From the height where I stood now, I should have been able to see the lighted streets of the town, though I don't recall actually doing so. My eyes had first been attracted and held by the lights in the middle distance; and from there they naturally followed the road that wound its patient, threadlike way through the wilderness, to be hidden at length by an escarpment which dropped almost vertical, a stone's throw from my feet.

Nothing stronger than the normal impulse one has to look over the edge of a cliff made me go to the edge of this precipice and look down. I had no premonition of any kind; no warning instinct whatever. Perhaps because I was so totally unprepared, the significance of what I saw didn't strike me at once. The huge disorder of the whole landscape in itself suggested that some cataclysmic convulsion had taken place. And in this setting, neither the bus, lying on its side like a matchbox splintered and broken open, nor the scattered smudged shapes surrounding it, seemed anything but appropriate.

The scene of the smash – a curve which the driver must have tried to take far too sharply – lay some distance below, just at the foot of the cliff over which I was peering. I remember wondering in a futile way how the woman I'd seen had managed to climb that nearly perpendicular slope, and why she hadn't kept to the road where one would think she'd have had better chances of finding assistance. Was she the sole survivor? If there were others, they must have got away; for no one seemed to be moving down there as I began (not very enthusiastically, I admit) to make the awkward descent.

The difficult scramble was all I could manage, tired out as I was, and I suppose I was half-way down before I looked again. The nearer I got to the wreckage, the more the distortion due to the queer cross-hatching of black and moonlight seemed to increase, so that I wasn't sure now if I saw movements or imagined them. But the possibility that injured people might, after all, be lying there needing my aid

made me hurry, I didn't waste time on another look until I'd finished the climb.

This time there was no doubt that movements in and around the debris were going on – no doubt at all. And I was too near to put them down to those tricks of light and shadow I spoke of. The idea flashed through my mind that several children had been involved in the accident, buried by some freak of impact in earth and stones, and that it was their limbs I saw fitfully stirring. But this I can't have believed for more than a split second, because I neither moved nor called out, as I certainly would have done if I'd thought I was looking at anything human.

There was really something essentially non-human about the movements, as I recall them. At the first glance they gave an impression of feebleness; of weak, blind persistence, like stirrings within a chrysalis or an egg. And they somehow revived in my mind a long-buried association, concerning (of all absurdities!) the ratcatcher of bygone days. As a child, I'd been shown pictures of this official, who used to go round the town, collecting live rats from the traps and drowning them in the river. How the rats writhed and wriggled and fought and struggled inside the sack on his shoulder, as he humped them along the streets to their doom! Now it was no longer in my imagination, but there under the ground in front of me, that these frantic undulations were taking place.

With the old ratcatcher story at the back of mind, I first thought a horde of monster rodents was being spawned, their wormlike appendages already extruded from the heaving earth. After all, there isn't such an enormous difference – except as regards size – between the rat family and the red dog breed, with their sniffing sharp-pointed muzzles and slender long hairless tails. Anybody unlucky enough to witness the prehensile-looking, tremulous, questing snouts of the red dogs nosing out food, will notice the similarity to the rodent mammals. By day of course, colouring makes

the comparison seem less apt; and even now, when I first saw the beasts, and in spite of the bleaching moon and the queer cross-shadows, their blackness seemed unduly intense. I remembered suddenly that at night red and black look the same: and then it dawned on me that red dogs were coming forth in front of my eyes.

In a profession like mine one learns to take startling sights in one's stride; but I doubt if I'd have been able to face the scene coolly except for my rigid training. It was as if a violent rape had resulted in the forced unnatural labour to which the earth was reluctantly given up. With my own eyes I was seeing the apotheosis of that force of disintegration I mentioned. It was that same force which within myself had produced the sense of everything being changed. And what a hideous change deprived our mother earth of her true self and integrity, compelling her to give birth to this monstrously foreign brood. What a perverse alchemy caused the components of the soil thus to extend their scope. For I soon observed that the red dogs were not only coming out of the ground but were actually composed of it; at first fused with the dust and at one with stones, gradually scaling themselves off like the scabby crusts of a hateful murrain on the flesh of our land.

Doubtless the proximity of the accident explained their prolific and rapid growth; but I knew nothing then of the sensitizing device by which the red dogs develop and attain independent life at high speed whenever environmental factors are specially favourable.

As I haven't judged others, I hope those who come after me won't judge me too harshly because I didn't try to strangle one or two of the beasts with my bare hands, or kick and stamp them to death, before my own blood, tissue and bone gave nourishment to more of their tribe. Such an act could have had no practical value. Long before I reached the scene of the crash the bus passengers were beyond human aid. What could I or any other weak creature have hoped to achieve, when the frenzied throes in which

earth herself repudiated the monstrosities bred from her substance, failed to consume them or to throw them off?

But I won't excuse myself. Let other people decide whether I am more or less to blame than those contemporaries of mine who made their peace with the invaders at the price of our liberty. The truth is, we are a slave race now, no matter how we try to ignore the fact by our silence, or to disguise it behind a mask of free-will. A traveller returning from abroad might not perhaps become immediately aware of the extent of our subjection. Convenient compromises have been arranged. We have found ingenious ways of living side-by-side with our masters. Everything is managed discreetly, and as unobtrusively as may be. Vacant lots, disused markets, and obscure dead-ends, have been chosen, where the minimum of notice is drawn to the truckloads of carcasses upon which the red dogs heap themselves as high as the rooftops. No one is obliged to frequent these places, except the specially picked gangs whose powerful hoses sluice them down after nightfall. By methods like these we have so far contrived to maintain the pretence that life continues as usual. But such a semblance of normality, based upon falsehood, is neither durable nor convincing. Even to-day it starts to show symptoms of breaking down.

One keeps asking oneself how and when the situation will end. Have the red dogs come to stay? Or will they eventually disappear from our planet, as inexplicably as they came? If they are to remain, it's clear that nothing which by the old standards makes life worth living is going to survive. In that case, human life, as we understand it, is doomed. If our kind does persist at all, it can only be in some form which doesn't bear thinking about – degenerate and diseased – debased to the service of carrion-feeders. But I can't afford to let myself dream for an instant that this is intended. Would the clouds have signalled me to begin my search if we were no more than an unsuccessful experiment to be swept aside?

How could I go on searching if I believed that our way of

life was to give way ultimately to the savagery of the red dogs? How could I go on living if I lost faith in my goal? Even if the mass of humanity falls so low as to become identified with the red dog régime, some individuals there must be somewhere who look upon such a fate with as much horror as I do. These are the unknown brothers I have to find. And though I don't know their names or their faces or where they live, I'm confident that we shall meet and recognize one another at the appointed time. One of my secret friends may be close to me as I am writing: at this very moment he may be walking along the street or sheltering in my doorway from a sudden shower. But on the other hand it's just as likely that the people I'm looking for inhabit a distant country, on the underside of the world. One hasn't even the slightest clue. Sometimes, I confess, I feel unequal to the tremendous search I have undertaken: the magnitude of the task seems overwhelming.

Some days I can't help feeling discouraged and lonely. And on those days I have to struggle against the wish that I could hand on my charge to some indefatigable person, more assured than myself. But this doesn't mean I am pessimistic about the outcome. I must not doubt the final success – I do not doubt it. In spite of everything, I'm convinced that a part of the earth still exists, uncontaminated by the red dogs, where I and my brother strangers will find a home. I'm sure that in the end we shall live again, as we once lived, in freedom, in peace, in our own right; without shame or subterfuge or alarm. That is my faith, by which I intend to stand. If a cynical voice were to whisper into my ear the words 'wishful thinking', I should refuse to listen. One must believe in something to keep oneself going.



*Patrick Leigh-Fermor*

## GREEK ARCHIPELAGOES

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### CRETE

Smoulders on sea, half-way to Africa,  
Solitary phoenix of the Ægean brood.  
Songs, shouts echo in a lunar wilderness  
Where blood flowers on the knuckles of the mountains.  
High in the ilex woods the black riflemen stalk  
Waking the din of bells; their jangling shots  
Uncoil interminable echoes. Here the hands of friends  
Grasp yours for ever.

Stone warrior up to the waist in sea  
Blue as an eye and circled by the blood  
Of minotaur and janissary and german!  
The wild goat leaps from biceps to armoured shoulder,  
And fossilized whiskers are a perch for eagles.  
The iron eye of Ida  
Looks towards Africa, the empty road  
Where no ship travels and the Libyan moon  
Only moves: the liquid desert  
That hides with the hazard of an excavation  
Forests of sponges, ringed by the tunnelling plunge  
Of men from Kalymnos, who, taut as miners,  
Work underwater.

\* \* \*

Count Spiridion and the noble Dionysios,  
Gonfaloniers of the Doge, walk down a silver stair  
Falter a moment by the looking-glass  
To lisp a rumour of the Mocenigo.

They puff their lace out, poisoning fastidious fingers  
On hilts of swords they never draw. The flicker  
Of paste buckles underneath a scutcheon  
Marks their way through barley-sugar columns  
Into the grape-green evening. There  
Lanterns in olive trees cast spokes of shade  
On lawns that slope to the sea. The lanterned boats  
Scatter the sound of mandolines on pearl-smooth  
water.

These are Corfu and Zante. Their balustrades,  
Magnolias and aloe-flowers are pale as snow  
Under a benevolent zodiac.  
These islands float like aloe petals  
On the Ionian, as though a south wind might  
Blow them away, baring the western sea  
Of the italianate septinsular galaxy.  
All but that dismal and preposterous mountain  
Those villages peopled by statues of shipowners,  
Where, on the limestone crags, gesticulate  
The lunatics of Cephalonia.

\* \* \*

Nothing seems older than the Cyclades  
Worn by the world's earliest winds, thumbled smooth by  
legend,  
They are the seamarks of history,  
Offering columns like an instrument  
To the wind's mouth; and these oleanders once gave  
shade  
To kings and philosophers that have left  
Not even, or nothing but, a name.  
Bargains were struck by merchants on the quays  
While the first heroes snored in the stifling marble  
Awaiting the sculptor's chisel, the tap of a bird's beak  
To hatch them.

They were stepping-stones to Troy  
 Trireme-harbours, milestones to Odysseys  
 A night's sleep for argonauts.  
 Their thoroughfares are stale with a million keels  
 Weaving and looping their course like wool-winders  
 Round the porous, the salty fingertips  
 Of a gigantic and drowned skeleton, jutting here  
 A bleached knee or a rib; or charred eye-socket  
 Like Santorin.  
 Santorin,  
 Curling and smoky and satanic  
 Fires a spiral ladder in the air  
 And balances a town among the birds.

\*            \*            \*

*Εν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος*

From the north

The autumn wind carries the storks over Patmos  
 From Kiev and Bukovina, Rila and the Euxine,  
 Mystra and Athos and the hanging Meteora,  
 Stretching their necks for Sinai. The slow armada  
 Tangles the passage of the Word of God:  
 A load of plumed and shifting fruit  
 Bends the branches of the only tree.

The Word of God split the rocks here  
 And built this battlemented monastery  
 On rocks that are Magians cast down and turned to stone,  
 To hide the Word, the leisure of the monks  
 From scimitars of the corsairs, a stone casket  
 For treasure of Constantinople and the Russias,  
 Mitres and flasks and chrysobuls and scrolls,  
 Gifts of half-legendary voivodes, and the crosiers  
 Of bishops who became saints.

(Foreheads of parchment seen in silver coffins,  
Palimpsests where the flourishes of mortality are faded  
Under the calligraphy of beatitude.)

The wind in the soaking darkness winds  
Through rocks and roofs, lifting the unwilling wing  
Of huddling storks.  
Thunder explodes, and the shuddering apocalypse  
Of lightning bares the shapes of cupolas  
The mountain-side and rain-logged wings  
And tethered caïques that rear like frightened horses.

\* \* \*

On an Ægean rock compound of salt  
And oil and lizards, the bent mastick-tree  
Under the sun's tread spills a lingering tear.  
The press destroys the olive. A gold tooth  
Sparkles in the dark under a tired forehead  
Striped like a tiger with the wipe of fingers  
Where the oil clings. Fingers that are fossils  
Roll a cigarette; juice streams from ankles  
Into the trodden vine-stalks among the jars  
And the must grumbles and hits, sending fumes as startling  
Into the vaults, as the sudden movement of the heart's  
Split-second scaffolding of a poem  
Assembling in the skull's archways.

The spite of the sun

Splinters the disc of shade the olive casts,  
Crumples the fetishes of the carob-tree  
That hang in haze and dazzle the track of the eye  
Under the ilex to the sea,  
The sea that gasps for sunset.  
These stones and thorns, that stone without a shadow,  
Are ambiguous emblems, they are  
Half-decipherable runes, notes in a tune  
That can't be memorized. (The unrancorous  
Moon will rise over an unsolved problem.)

The donkey waiting under a load of jars  
Under the prickly-pear and the white walls  
Of this necropolis brays without an echo  
To stir the rare blue waterfalls of shade.  
There is nothing here, nothing at all.  
Only, perhaps, a question or a mood  
A reference or a suggestion,  
Rocks and the sun, and pastures for dolphins  
Scattered with other islands, old and bare  
As jutting bones, recent as thunderbolts.

Unfathomable wells  
Tunnel the heart of the pumice. Like a hand  
The fig leaf lays a shadow on the dust.

These islands are the end of a hundred worlds.



*Jules Supervielle*

## A CHILD OF THE HIGH SEAS

*Translated from the French by Dorothy Baker*

---

How was it made, this floating street? What sailors, with the aid of what architects, had built it on the high Atlantic ocean, on the very surface of the sea, above a gulf of some six thousand metres? This long street of red brick houses, so discoloured now that they had taken on a shade of French grey, these roofs of slate and tile, these humble, immutable shops? And this spire with its lacy stonework? And here a little patch containing nothing but sea-water, though evidently it was intended for a garden, enclosed as it was by walls topped by bits of broken bottle, over which occasionally a fish leapt?

How did all these things manage to keep upright, without ever being washed away by the waves?

And this lonely, twelve-year-old child, who went in clogs and with a firm step along the watery street, as though she were treading the earth's hard surface? How did all this come about?

All these things I will explain to you in good time and insofar as I myself understand them. And if, when all is said, some things still remain a mystery, they will do so in spite of me.

Whenever a ship approached, even before it was perceptible on the horizon, the child was seized with a great sleepiness and the village disappeared completely beneath the waves. So no sailor, not even from the end of a telescope, had ever set eyes on the village, or even suspected its existence.

The child thought she was the only little girl in the world. But did she really know that she *was* a little girl?

She wasn't a very pretty child, because of her teeth that were rather uneven and her nose a little too turned-up, but she had a very white skin with a few gentle freckles on it. And her small person, dominated by two grey eyes, rather shy but extremely luminous, sent through you, from your body right to your soul, a sense of great wonderment, a wonderment old and deep as time itself.

In the street, the only one of this little village, the child sometimes looked to left or to right of her, as though expecting a light wave of the hand or a nod of the head, some friendly sign of recognition. It was simply an impression she gave, without knowing it, for nothing and no-one could ever come to this lost village, always ready to swoon away beneath the waves.

What did she live on? From what she caught fishing, you may think? No, I don't think that was what she lived on. She found food in the cupboard of the kitchen safe, even found meat there, every two or three days. There were also potatoes, a few other vegetables, and occasionally an egg.

In the cupboards the food was constantly renewed. And though she took jam from the pot, the jam remained at the same level, as though things had one day been like that and must remain so evermore.

Every morning, at the baker's, half a pound of new bread, wrapped up in paper, awaited the child, on the marble counter behind which she had never seen any person, not even the hand nor the finger of one, pushing the bread towards her.

She got up early and raised the metal drop-shutters of the shops (here you could read *Public Bar* and the *Blacksmith, Modern Bakery* or *Draper*). She opened the shutters of all the houses, fastening them back carefully because of the strong seawind, and she left the windows open or closed according to the weather. In some of the kitchens she lit a fire, so that smoke arose above two or three of the roofs.

An hour before going to bed she began to close the

shutters as though it were the most natural thing in the world, and she lowered the shop-shutters of corrugated iron.

The child carried out these tasks as though moved by some instinct, some daily inspiration that forced her to watch over everything. In fine weather she left a carpet hanging from an open window, or a piece of washing to dry, as though it were necessary at all costs for the village to preserve an inhabited air, to appear as life-like as possible.

And all the year round she had to take care of the flag on top of the little *mairie*, for it was much exposed to all weathers.

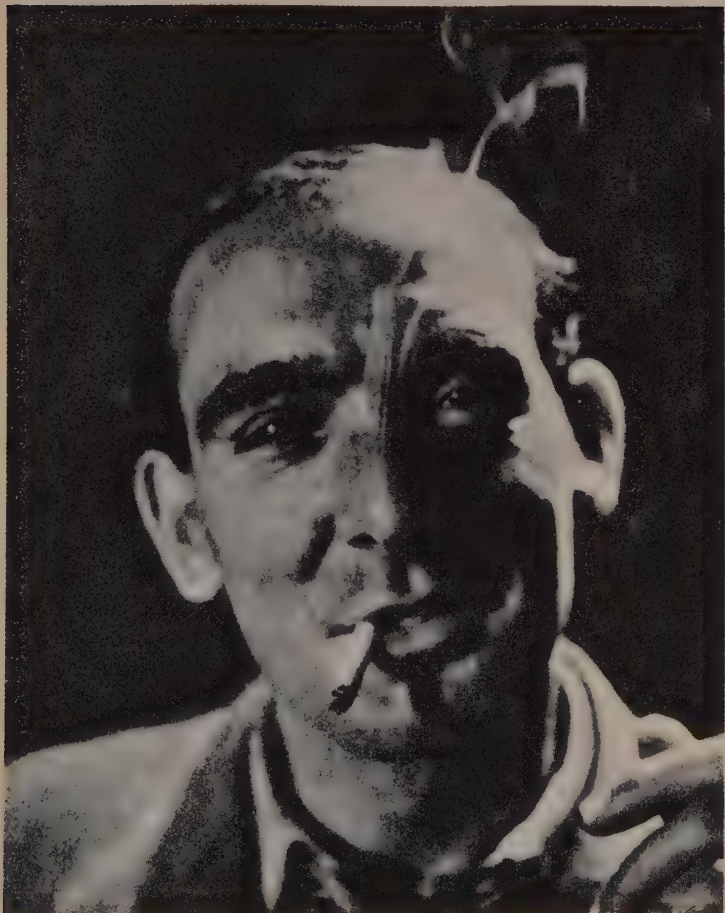
At night she lit the candles or sewed by the light of a lamp. Electricity had been installed in several of the houses, and the child switched on the lights gracefully and naturally. Once she put a crêpe bow on the doorknocker of one of the houses. She found that very nice. And it remained there for two or three days. Then she hid it.

Another time she found herself beginning to beat on the drum, the big drum of the village, as though to announce some piece of news. And she had a violent desire to cry out something that might be heard in every corner of the ocean, but her throat closed up and no sound came. She made such a desperate effort that her face and neck became almost black, like the face and neck of a drowned person. Then she had to put back the drum in its accustomed place, in the left-hand corner at the bottom end of the big room of the *mairie*.

The child mounted the steeple by a spiral staircase, its steps worn away by thousands of feet she had never seen. The steeple, which the child thought must have at least five thousand steps (there were really ninety-two) let in large slices of sky through its yellow, widely-spaced brickwork. And arriving at the top, she had to readjust the clock weights and wind up the clock with a crank, so that it would strike the hours truly, by day and by night.

The crypt, the altars, the stone saints giving their silent

PORTRAITS OF CONTRIBUTORS



GEORGE BARKER

*Russell Clarke*



NORMAN NICHOLSON





P. H. NEWBY



ALAN ROSS

*Thea Umlauff*



JOCELYN BROOKE

*Lambert Weston*

JOHN ALDRIDGE



Waggon and Dovecot



The Engine on the Pyghtle

EDWARD BAWDEN



A Dry Moat



Horns and Antlers



JOHN MINTON



Portrait Group

*Tel-Aviv Museum*



The Wheel

*Private Collection*

DENTON WELCH



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Le Taureau Noir

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MATISSE



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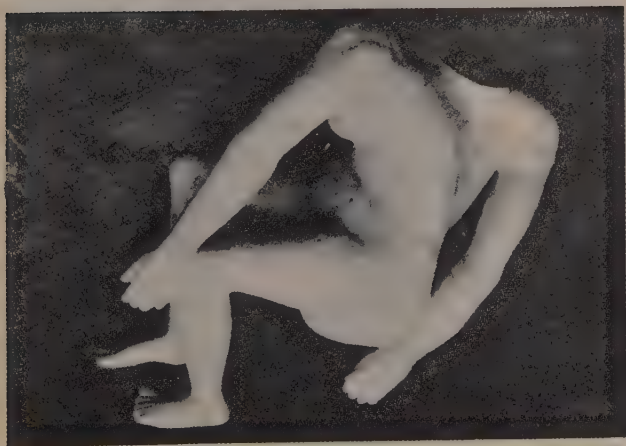
Maschera

MARINO MARINI



Il Cavaliere

ARTURO MARTINI



Donna che nuota sotto acqua

R. T. LAMBERT



Street Scene, Mexico



Peasant Girl

orders, all the chairs in good straight rows, and scarcely making a rustle, stood awaiting people of all ages; these altars where the gold had tarnished, would go on tarnishing through the ages; all these things both attracted and repelled the child, and she never entered the tall house, contenting herself in her hours of leisure by half-opening the padded door and snatching a brief glimpse of the interior, holding her breath as she did so.

In a trunk in her room were family papers; there were picture postcards from Dakar, from Rio de Janeiro and Hong-Kong; and they were signed *Charles* or *C. Lievens* and addressed to Steenvoorde (Nord). The child of the high seas knew nothing of this Charles and this Steenvoorde.

She had also, in a cupboard, a photograph album. One of the photographs showed a child that very much resembled the sea-child, and she often contemplated it with humility. It always seemed to her that the child in the photograph was the true, the right person; she was holding a hoop. The child had searched in all the houses of the village to find one like it. And one day she thought she had succeeded. It was the iron hoop of a barrel; but as soon as she began to bowl it along the sea-street, the hoop rolled wide and disappeared into the ocean.

In one photograph the little girl was standing between a man dressed as a sailor and a bony woman in her Sunday best. The child of the sea, who had never seen man or woman, had long asked herself what these people meant, had even puzzled over this question in the depths of the night, when lucidity sometimes comes in a single flash, with the force of a lightning stroke.

Every morning, she went to the village school, with a great cardboard folder under her arm, in which she kept her exercise books, a grammar, an arithmetic, a history of France and a geography book.

She also possessed, edited by Gaston Bonnier, member of the Institute, Professor at the Sorbonne, and by Georges de



Layens, laureate of the Academy of Sciences, a little herbal containing the most common plants, including both useful and harmful varieties; and the book was illustrated by eight hundred and ninety-eight drawings.

She read in its preface: 'During summer, nothing is easier than to procure in large quantities the plants of field and wood.'

And the history, the geography, the countries, the great men, the mountains, the rivers and the boundaries, how explain *them* to someone who knows nothing more than the empty street of a little village in the most solitary spot on all the wide ocean? But the sea itself, the sea which she saw marked on all the maps, did she even know she lived on it? She had once thought it possible, one day, just for one second. Then she had chased away the notion as dangerous and unwise.

At times, and with complete submission, she listened, then wrote a few words, listened again, then began writing once more, as though under dictation from an invisible schoolmistress. Then the child opened her grammar, and for a long time, her breath held, she bent over page 60, exercise CLXVIII, for this was the exercise she loved above all others. Here the grammar seemed to speak directly to the child of the high seas:

*– are you? – are you thinking – are you speaking? – do you want? – must I appeal? – is it happening? – are they accusing? – are you capable? – are you guilty? – is it about? – are you keeping this present? – Come, – are you complaining?*

(Replace the dashes by suitable interrogative pronouns, with or without the preposition.)

Sometimes the child felt an insistent desire to write down certain sentences. And she did so with great concentration. Here are a few of the sentences she wrote, chosen from a great many:

*Let us share this, shall we?*

*Listen carefully! Sit down, don't move, I beg you.*

*If only I had a little snow from the high mountains, the day would pass more quickly.*

*Foam, foam that surrounds me, will you not one day become something hard and firm?*

*To sing rounds, at least three people are needed.*

*There were two headless shadows walking along a dusty road.*

*Night, day; day, night; clouds and flying fish.*

*I thought I heard a noise, but it was only the noise of the sea.*

At other times she wrote a letter, giving news of the little village and of herself. It was written to no-one, and when she ended it she sent her love to no person, and on the envelope there was no name.

And the letter finished, she threw it into the sea – not to get rid of it but because that was what she had to do with it – like those shipwrecked mariners, maybe, who leave in some desperate bottle their last message to the waves.

Time did not pass in the floating village. The child was always twelve years old. And it was in vain she stretched her small body in front of the wardrobe mirror in her bedroom. One day, tired of resembling the photograph in her album, with its wide forehead and plaits, she became vexed with herself and her portrait and spread her hair wildly about her shoulders, hoping that her age might thereby be violently and immediately changed. Or maybe the seas that surrounded her would bring some kind of transformation and she would see come out of them large goats with foaming beards, who would come near to her out of curiosity.

But the sea remained empty and the only visits she received were those of the shooting stars.

And then, one day, it was as though at last there was a change of destiny, a little crack in its firm purpose. A real, live cargo-boat, headstrong as a bull-dog and riding easily over the sea, even though lightly loaded (a lovely red band painted below her water-line gleamed in the sunlight) – a real, live cargo-boat passed along the sea-street of the village, and this time the village did not disappear nor was the young girl overcome by sleep.

It was exactly mid-day. The cargo-boat blew its siren, but the call of the siren did not mingle with the notes which struck from the steeple. Each sound preserved its independence.

The child, aware for the first time of a noise from the world of men, rushed to the window and cried out with all her might:

‘Help! Help!’

and she threw her little black school pinafore in the direction of the boat.

The man at the helm did not even turn his head. And a sailor, with smoke coming out of his mouth, passed over the bridge as though nothing had happened. Others continued to do their washing, while on either side of the prow dolphins turned aside to make way for the cargo-boat which seemed to be in a hurry.

The little girl descended quickly into the street, lay down in the wake of the boat and embraced its tracks for such a long time that when she got up nothing was left but a stretch of immemorial and virgin sea. On going back to the house the child was amazed that she had cried ‘Help!’ She knew nothing at all of the word, only its very deepest meaning. And this meaning frightened her. Did the men not hear her voice? Were they blind and deaf, these sailors? Or were they more cruel than the depths of the sea?

Then a wave came to find her. This wave was extremely independent and had hitherto kept a distance from the village. It was a large wave and could spread out on either side much further than any other. In its crest it carried two seeming eyes of foam. It was as though it could see and understand certain things, without always approving. Although it formed and broke many hundred times a day, it never forgot to furnish itself afresh with these two eyes, always set in exactly the same position and very life-like. Sometimes, when the wave’s attention was taken by something interesting, it might be found resting for a whole minute together, its crest in the air, its function of wave

that made it necessary to break and remake every seven seconds completely forgotten.

For a long time this wave had wanted to do something for the child, without exactly knowing what. The wave saw the cargo-boat sail off into the distance and understood very well the agony of the one who was left behind. Keeping aloof no longer, it drew the child a little way off, without any word being spoken, and as though leading her by the hand.

After kneeling in front of the child, in the manner of waves, and with the very greatest reverence, it rolled the child in its depths, pressed her there for one long moment, seeking, with the help of death, to snatch the child from her unhappiness. And to help the wave in this grave task, the child stopped breathing.

But the end did not come; so the wave threw the child high in the air, tossed her easily, as though she were no bigger than a sea-swallow, caught and recaught her like a ball, till she fell back at last among foam flakes big as the eggs of an ostrich.

At last, seeing that nothing could come of all this, that it could not succeed in bringing death to the child, the wave, in an immense murmur of tears and apologies, carried her back home.

And the little girl, who had suffered not a single scratch from this ordeal, began once more, without hope, to open and shut the shutters, and to disappear momentarily into the sea, as soon as the mast of a ship began to point towards the horizon.

Sailors who dream on the high seas, your elbows leaning on the taffrail, beware of thinking too long, in the darkness and the night, of a beloved face. You might risk giving birth, in these places so essentially desolate, to a being that though endowed with human sensibility, cannot live or die or love, yet suffers as though living and loving and always on the point of death; a being most infinitely disinherited among those watery solitudes, like that child of the high seas

conceived one day in the mind of Charles Lievens of Steenvoorde, a deckhand aboard the four-master *Le Hardy*, who having lost his twelve-year-old daughter during one of his voyages, had, one night, at a latitude of fifty-five degrees north and a longitude of thirty-five degrees west, thought of her for a long time and with terrible intensity, to the great unhappiness of that child.



*Odysseus Elytis*

## TWO POEMS

*Translated from the Greek by Nanos Valaoritis*

## I

## BODY OF SUMMER

—

THE last shower was heard long ago  
 On the ants and the lizards  
 Now the enormous sky is burning;  
 The fruits paint their lips  
 The pores of the earth open up slowly  
 And near the water that drips and mutters  
 A huge plant stares into the eyes of the sun.

On the upper sands who is he that lies  
 On his back and smokes the silver olive-leaves?  
 The cicadas warm in his ears  
 The ants toil on his breast  
 Lizards slide in the turf of his armpits,  
 And over his sea-weed feet gently rolls a wave  
 Sent by the little siren that sang.

Oh body of Summer naked and burnt  
 Eaten away by the olive oil and the salt  
 Body of the rock and shiver of the heart  
 Great waving of the osier's hair  
 Smell of basil over the pubic curls  
 Full of stars and pine needles  
 Body deep vessel of the Day!

The slow rains come, the sudden hailstorms  
The earth drifts beaten in the blizzard's claws  
Which darkens in the deep with angry waves  
The hills sink into the thick clusters of clouds  
Yet from beyond you smile carefree  
You recover your imperishable hour  
As the sun meets you again on the sands  
As the sky in your naked health.

## II

## SADNESS OF THE ÆGEAN

—

WHAT presence of soul in the halcyons of the afternoon  
What sea-calm in the voices of distant shores  
The cuckoo in the garment of the trees  
The secret moment at the fishermen's supper  
The sea playing with an accordion  
The distant longing of a woman  
The lovely one that uncovered her breasts  
When memory entered the nests  
When lilacs sprinkled the west with fire.

On the caiques beneath the sails of a Madonna  
They went under the guard of winds  
The lovers of the lily's estrangement.  
But how did the night babble the sleep to this point  
With murmuring hair on the shining throats  
Or on the great white shores  
And how under the golden sword of Orion  
Scattered and leapt high  
Dust from the dreams of girls  
With a smell of mint and basil.

On the cross-roads where stood the ancient witch  
Setting the winds aflame with dry thyme  
While the nimble shadows stepped lightly  
Carrying a jug full of Silent Water  
Easily they moved as though to enter paradise  
And among the prayers of the crickets ticking across the  
    plains  
Wearing the skin of the moon the lovely ones came  
To dance on the midnight threshing floor.

Oh, you omens crossing in the depths  
Of the water which holds a mirror  
And you the quiet glittering lilies.  
When the sword of Orion returns  
It will find under the lamp a poor man's bread  
But the soul within the ashes of the stars  
Shall find huge blended hands spreading to the infinite  
And a lovely sea-weed the last born of the shore  
And years like green stones.

Oh, green stone – what storm-Seer saw you  
Halting the light at the birth of day  
The light at the birth of the world's two eyes.

## *Sid Chaplin*

### BREAD

---

'Are ye sure ye're all right, Danny?' said his wife.

'Ah'm all right,' he said. 'Ah'm in good enough fettle now. And Ah wish ye'd stop asking questions,' he added irritably.

'Well ...' she said. 'Remember it's your first time out. A fortnight ye've been laid up —'

'Ah'll tell ye for the last time now,' he exclaimed passionately, 'Ah'm all right; Ah'm sick of bein' pent i' the house. It's three Sundays since Ah was at chapel; and Ah'm goin' to-night for sure!'

He got up from the table, prepared to leave the room if she had anything else to say. And he thought: she wraps herself round a man like one of those creeping plants; putting out tendrils to touch the tender wound, the secret part; her incessant, loving little questions like sly fingers probing into his soul. And he was sick of it. He'd had a fortnight of it; unceasing question in her voice, yes, and even in her very silence there had been a watchful waiting. And he couldn't answer any questions about those days in darkness. He wanted to sponge them out of his mind for ever. That was what he wanted; but it was hard. For instance, the first two or three days he'd been pretty weak and she'd fed him on slops ... then one morning she'd brought him for breakfast an egg and a thin slice of bread and butter. He hadn't thought of it until he'd taken the slice into his hand and folded it, and thought; this is bread. Bread. And bread is hard to forget. You can forget faces because there are so many of them that in their ceaseless variety one past face can be slurred in the memory. But bread, a slice of bread, is something you have to face every day. And one slice doesn't differ from another. No one is allowed to forget bread —

He had silenced her. For a time, anyway. Her sharp sloe-black eyes darted to the children. 'Eat those crusts!' she exclaimed. 'Many a poor bairn would be glad of 'em! Now just get them eaten!'

Oh, gracious God, he prayed, ease it a bit; dinna drive the spur in too hard! But really it was amazing how easily a man could keep his face while that sort of thing was going on inside him. Now watch me shove my chair back under the table and say quite smoothly: 'Ah'll see that the hens and pigs are locked in while all of ye are gettin' ready.'

'Ah locked them, da; honest Ah did!' protested the eldest boy.

He smiled. 'Just to make sure. And to get the feel of the open air again. A bit practice, like.'

'Ye'd better let Billy go down wi' ye,' said his wife. 'Just in case ...' That interrogative look on her face again; that look sharp as a lance. For she knew him; and she knew now that there was one secret in him locked apart from her.

'All right,' he answered wearily. 'Come on, Billy.'

The boy ran ahead, bairn-like, full of glory and happiness. What was that, now, that Macpherson had once said: When we're young we're happy and don't know it. Then we grow up and we start to talk about happiness, and can't grasp it. That was true.

Well, after five days in darkness, and a fortnight pent up in the house, this was good. It had rained all day; had, indeed, just faired up before tea. And a film of rain covered the path making a mirror from which his face looked up oddly and infrequently. Little beads of rain tipped the grass; and a crystal drop stood on every hawthorn leaf, like a jewel on a suddenly opened hand. It was all so good and fresh and rich. And he turned his eyes to the hills, seeing the washed purple of the heather-line broken by the white fall of Risehope Beck, springing, like a jet of milk, from the belly of the hills. Good to look into the sky, water-rid and fresh as if just painted a split-second before his look; with the plucked, slender feathers of some celestial goose serving



model for clouds, light and airborne and windswept. And he lifted his head and opened his nostrils for the air, like wine to the lungs.

The doors were all locked, of course. Everything was in order. The acre of young wheat, green sturdy shoots six inches high. All he had planted in the vegetable plot going fine. Neatly fenced, a noble little farm of an acre and a quarter. Later perhaps he'd extend, buy a little more land and leave the pit for ever. The land was in his blood. This year, God willing, he'd take a bunch of his own wheat to decorate the chapel at harvest-time. Well, it looked as if God *was* willing. He was here, and the wheat was sending up good green shoots to ripen. And they cut the corn and stand it in sheaves, another voice than his said, a voice small and apart, yet within. And they thresh it until the grain is separated from straw and chaff. Then they mill the grain and make of it flour; smooth between thumb and forefinger. And out of the flour they make bread. Bread. Bread. Bread.

He felt his brow. There was a moist film there like the film on the path; but thick and oily to the touch. And again he tried to forget ...



And now it was over, and he was at ease in his own seat; at home in the chapel. His wife, the three boys, himself. The soft murmur of gossip between pews. The sweet rise of the circular stairway to the pulpit where the Reverend may stand like a captain before his people. How many people had stopped him before entering and shook his hand and given unspoken sympathy for his ordeal? He had lost count.

'Ye're well-liked, Danny,' his wife had whispered when they were in their pew. He had turned aside, shocked. But here a man can find peace. The ranks of the choir and behind them the organ rising like a castle with towers to the far roof. Here a man can find peace. For peace comes flowing like a river in the singing of hymns; in the hush of prayer and the word of scripture. He hardly heard the text

as the Reverend began his sermon. Nothing else was needed but to be here; all he required was to sit and drink in peace and a healing for those days in darkness and the fortnight in torment. And then, somehow, something of what the Reverend was saying began to come through. 'God will forgive us. But the testing of a man's mettle comes when he has to forgive himself ...'

And then, suddenly, terribly, it was all back again. He had, he remembered, left Joe working at the coal-face whilst he had his snack. The heading was a cold place to sit in, so he'd pulled on his jacket before eating his snack. And he could remember looking up at the twisted timber roof-supports and the great slipping layers of stone above, and thinking it didn't look too safe.

After he'd finished eating he'd slipped into a kind of doze. He had conjured up a picture of his small-holding. Chin on breast, eyes closed, he had seen the sheaves golden in the sunlight. And a crack like the lash of a whip had flicked his ear-drum. And another. Then the sound of a spill as the layers of post-stone shifted. 'Danny! Danny!' It was Joe shouting from the face. His dream of sheaves had shifted as his eyes opened to a rocking world. The strata nipped together somewhere outbye, expelling a savage cloud of dust. He had felt the infinitely small grains beating on his bare legs, his hands, his neck. He had run for his life, knowing that earth was closing like a vice at his heels. He had reached Joe and both had thrown themselves against the belly of coal. And after a while Joe had said, his voice muffled because he was lying on top of him, 'It's stopped, Danny.' He had left his lamp behind, but Joe had shone the thin ray of his into the cloud of dust. The ray had spread from a bright core in rings of diminishing light to a merging with the edge of darkness; had revealed a mass of debris sealing the entrance ...

Macpherson was still at his sermon. The old man stood erect in the pulpit, immensely tall, as white as a badger his hair. And Danny fell to wondering how the words came

fresh-coined and fluent from the invisible mint, an endless stream of them, winged words for the hearts of men. It came to him like a revelation as he sat there listening; he loved the old man. He'd known the Reverend ten years now; ten years since the old man had come to Little Gomorrah on the edge of the moors. And it had taken him ten years to discover that he loved Macpherson. He sat alone with his revelation, around him the oblivious, nodding heads of a congregation; his wife with a fixed hypnotic smile on her face, the boys shifting uncomfortably.

Joe had said ruefully, 'Well, my bottle and bait-tin are under that bit wall. And Ah'm as dry as a lime-kiln!' He had pulled his bottle out. 'Here, have a drink, lad; there's a drop left. But go canny; we'll need it.' So help me God I never thought of the other till he said, after he'd handed the bottle back, 'Lucky ye had your snack!'

'Aye; just in time,' he'd answered mechanically. Then his hand had closed on the small tin in his pocket, and he'd remembered what was inside. And he had thought: Well, it's mine, isn't it? arguing silently with himself. That argument had lasted a long time. And he had said nothing about it. Joe had said, 'We'll be here a while. If Ah know anything at all she's down to the bottom as far as the engine-plane ...'

Joe was a small, lithe man with darting eyes; always joking, nothing a trouble, a good marrer. Ah, forget Joe! he urged hopelessly. Is Joe to be a burden for ever?

'Amen!' said Macpherson. His sermon was finished. He announced the next hymn and the organ swelled. Voice rose above organ, 'Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land; I am weak, but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy powerful hand: Bread of heaven! Feed me now and evermore.' The words printed above the first verse wavered in his vision. Bread. Bread of heaven. Bread. What does it mean? Arglwydd, arwain trwy'r anial-wch. Welsh William Williams's dedication. Could ask the Reverend. He'd know. Then the chorus came winging into his consciousness like a barbed arrow. 'Bread of heaven!

Feed me now and evermore – evermore; feed me now ...'  
And his mouth was dry.

It seemed like a hint from the Almighty. He looked at Macpherson's face. Could *he* know – could he have guessed it? The Reverend caught his eye and smiled encouragingly. No, of course not. Only he himself had the burden to bear.

For Joe had never known. And he hadn't intended, at first he hadn't, to keep it for himself. He'd intended to keep it safe until the moment came, when strength waned. Then he would share it with Joe. Just as he had shared the water, and they say water's more important. They had slept fitfully after the savage bout with the barrier. God knows how long they'd worked away at it, but it was dead-rotten above, like making a hole in sand. They hadn't made much of a mark and it got to be dangerous, so they'd crawled back to the belly of the coal to sleep. Once, both had wakened, startled by a creaking outbye. They had watched the balk nearest the barrier of debris crack dead-centre, revealing below the grey bark yellow slivers; and the V had filled with post-stone until the break reached the floor, filling up the bit of ground they'd cleared. 'That's that!' Joe had said, and had crawled over to the break in the balk to tear away some of those yellow slivers. He had given one to Danny. 'They reckon the Germans can make bread outa sawdust; let's chew this.' The slivers had been slimy and resinous; bitter to the taste. They'd had to spit them out. That was when he knew that he was keeping It for himself. For they were getting weak now. And he was changing. He was watching Joe like a cat watches a mouse; and he was half-throttled with hunger. The time to do it was when Joe fell asleep; but every time he started to pull the tin out Joe would stir uneasily, and awake, and start to talk. About the last time he said it didn't matter anyway; they'd drawn their checks; and he looked at Danny with the shadow of a smile playing around his lips, 'And ye scratted and saved to buy that bit land, and now that ye've got it, this had to happen.'

'Joe,' he said, 'Joe! We'll get out! Dinna talk that way!' And that was the moment when he'd almost broken the hard thing within him, almost had pulled out the tin, to break and share what he treasured inside it. But Joe had fallen asleep.

'To-night ... The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper,' the Reverend was saying. And then, at those words, he knew that as long as he lived the agony of those days would stay with him, and the shadow of small, lithe Joe at his shoulder. For under the pulpit, on a small table, the napkin white as snow concealed the bread. For I have received of the Lord, recited traitor memory, that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it —

He broke it. Joe was asleep at last; and the texture of it was dry to his mouth, but sweet as honey. And Joe had never stirred while he cautiously ate, masticating slowly, tasting every morsel jealously. And then, when it was all gone, he had stirred up the dust and fine coal, just in case Joe should waken up and switch on his lamp again and see the infinitely small crumbs white against the dead-black, and know. Then he also had fallen asleep; but somehow Joe had never awakened. And the one slice must have saved his life; the one slice of bread.

So he waited in the chapel, and he knew that he should leave, but he was powerless. At the sound of his leaving all would look up and see his secret in his face. But that was not all. The moment would come when his hand would receive the bread and he would feel again the texture of it between finger and thumb. He would know the mercy of God in the broken body. To-night he would break bread as he should have done with Joe. The hills would jet mercy like milk; the white cloth concealed his peace. He felt again that film on his forehead; his fingers slithered over oil of repentance. Yes, forgiven. But the mettle of a man is tested when he has to forgive himself; and no man can hide himself from bread.



*Bernard Spencer*

TWO POEMS

I

AT COURMAYEUR

---

THIS climbers' valley with its wayside shrines  
(the young crowned Mother and her dying flowers)  
became our theme for weeks. Do you remember  
the letters that we wrote and how we planned  
the journey there and chose our hotel; ours  
was to be one 'among the pines'?

Guesses went wide; but zig-zag past that ridge  
the road climbs from the Roman town; there stand  
the glittering peaks, and one, the God, immensely  
tossing the clouds around his shoulders; here  
are what you asked for, summer pastures and  
an air with glaciers in its edge.

Beyond each pause is mountain water falling;  
at night, the river seems to draw more closely:  
darling, how did you think I could forget you,  
you who for ever stayed behind? Your absence  
is hard and real as rocks. Just now it was  
those hangdown flowers that meant recalling.

## II

## THE BOATS

Five boats beside the lake,  
 pulled bows first up the shore; how hard it is  
 to draw them, from each angle changing, elegant:  
 their feminine poise, the 'just so' lifting sweep  
 of the light timbers round the flanks sucked thin  
 into the thirsty bows

The same or nearly  
 as makes no difference, since men settled first  
 near these magnolias, lived the different life  
 that is always the same; fished, traded, hammered,  
     gossiped,  
 wanted their food and wine, appeased the Powers,  
 meditated journeys  
 or turned and turned in their mind some woman's  
 image lost or distant.

Near this bench and the keels  
 someone has scratched in the dust the name ELSA.

*Helen Spalding*

THE GIANT FISTS OF THE SEA

---

The giant fists of the sea  
Pound on the rocks like man against his fate,  
Crying, crying, This cannot be, this may not be.

The massed winds hurl their weight  
Against the walls and doors,  
Thrusting, thrusting, like man against his fate,  
Raging with tears, It cannot be, it may not be.

Until exhausted  
The fists open, the palms of the sea lie spread,  
The bleeding winds slump under tor and tree,

And the rocks and the walls and doors  
Are heard repeating through distance and through silence,  
Monotonously,  
This must be, let it be, this has to be.

*E. J. Scovell*

RETURN FROM THE BEACH

---

Across the sands burdened with their dark tone,  
With heat of honey and with seams of stone-  
blue shade under the day-long azure,  
The holiday-makers turn from pleasure,

Turn from the brilliant west in twos and fours,  
In groups dispersed and quiet, with their powers  
Of play before the light failing,  
With trailing child and his spade trailing;

The women bearing their weight, the youths their lightness,  
The outriding boys still in a mould of brightness,  
The girl tranced by beatitude,  
The man pleased with his hardihood,

All in their human posture pacing on  
As if they carried their lives in the form of a crown.  
Late cricketers, a lingering couple  
With gulls possess the world of opal.

David Magarshack

## CHEKHOV AND HIS PRODUCERS

---

Anton Chekhov, the only name among Russian dramatists really familiar to the English playgoer, has gained so firm a hold on the English stage that it may not be amiss to ask how far Chekhov plays in their English guise really represent what Chekhov wrote and, more particularly, what Chekhov wanted to express by an art he took to only late in life.

Before turning to an analysis of Chekhov's art as a playwright, however, something ought to be said about the belief, unfortunately widely held both in England and America, that the chief characteristic feature of his plays is inaction. This belief has become so deeply rooted, for reasons that will become apparent later on, that in a recent American translation of Chekhov's plays, a footnote to Chekhov's stage direction in *The Seagull* - the action takes place on Sorin's country estate - informs the reader quite blandly that it is ridiculous to speak of action in a Chekhov play since its main characteristic is inaction. What has been chiefly responsible for this idea, or at any rate for the idea that a Chekhov play is characterized by lack of action, is the intrinsic nature of the drama of Chekhov which is quite different from the drama of direct action to which we are accustomed. The main characteristic of a Chekhov play is not inaction, but indirect action, that is to say, it is not a play in which nothing ever happens, but one in which the main dramatic action does not happen on the stage. *The Seagull*, for instance, is full of the most dramatic incidents. Its hero attempts to commit suicide, and in the end does commit suicide. Its heroine runs away from home, is disowned by her rich parents, is seduced, has an illegitimate child and the child dies, is abandoned by her lover, and, generally, experiences one disaster after another, any one of which would have been enough to make a full-length play.



In addition, we have no less than five love affairs, and a multiplicity of themes tacked on to the main theme, which would have provided several plots for any ordinary playwright. But – and this is what is so characteristic of a Chekhov play – none of these highly dramatic incidents takes place on the stage. What we see is merely how these incidents shape and influence the lives of the characters. Now, far from being invented by Chekhov or being characteristic only of his art as a playwright, this drama of indirect action is the oldest type of drama in existence, namely, Greek drama. To say that it lacks action is to misunderstand the very nature of dramatic action, which finds its highest expression in repose, in a pause, in inner rather than in outer movement. An actor who stands still on the stage is not inactive. On the contrary, he should be more active in such a pose than when, for instance, lighting a cigarette or making love to the heroine. A faint smile can be more shattering in its dramatic effect than firing a pistol or transfixing your enemy with a sword. But, of course, it is quite true that since the Elizabethans modern drama has been mainly of the direct action type. Nor must the fact be overlooked that when Chekhov began writing plays, he was anxious to write plays of the usual type, that is, plays of direct action. His first two plays, *Ivanov* and *The Woodsprite*, were of that type, and it was his failure in what might be called the ordinary type of drama, due chiefly to the fact that he was not a man of the theatre, that drove Chekhov to take up the older drama of indirect action. This transition from one type of play to another can be plainly seen when we compare *The Woodsprite* with *Uncle Vanya*. In *The Woodsprite*, which is merely an earlier version of *Uncle Vanya*, the main character is Dr Astrov, who bears the name of Khrushchov, and who in the end marries Sonia. Uncle Vanya, who in Chekhov's first version of the play appears rather characteristically under the name of Uncle George (Chekhov did not change his surname Voynitsky), shoots himself in the last act but one instead of firing at

and missing the old professor. The whole play does not revolve round the character of Uncle Vanya, but round Astrov's or Khrushchov's attempts to reclaim his land by afforestation (hence his nickname Woodsprite). Helen, the young wife of the elderly professor, runs away from her husband after Voynitsky's suicide (in the first version, too, Voynitsky is in love with her), but returns to him, as a good wife should, in the last act, which has the most artificial happy ending a great playwright ever contrived. Chekhov published *The Woodsprite* in a magazine in 1890, but later withdrew it from the list of his published plays and would not allow any theatre to perform it. One can't help feeling that the unusually gloomy ending of *Uncle Vanya* is due chiefly to Chekhov's unhappy experiment with the happy ending of *The Woodsprite*. Be that as it may, the fact remains that, having failed in his attempts to write plays of direct action, that is to say, plays in which, to use Granville Barker's definition of a Shakespearean play, nothing of any dramatic significance ever happens off stage, but every important incident takes place in full view of the audience, Chekhov turned to indirect action plays, which, as has already been pointed out, belong to a much more ancient type of drama.

Indeed, what is so characteristic of a Chekhov play is that it possesses the main elements of Greek drama through which the function of action is expressed. These are: the 'messenger' element, the function of which is to tell the audience about the chief dramatic incidents that take place off stage (in a direct action play the 'messenger' element is, as a rule, a structural flaw); the arrival and departure of certain characters in the play round which the chief incidents that do occur on the stage are grouped; the presence of a chorus which, as Aristotle points out, 'forms an integral part of the whole play and shares in the action'; further, the most powerful element of emotional interest in indirect action plays, which is also their main instrument for sustaining suspense and arousing surprise, and which

Aristotle calls 'peripetia', a theatrical term that, by the way, is in common use in Russian, meaning the reversal of the situation leading up to the dénouement – Aristotle defines it as 'a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to the rule of probability or necessity'; and, finally, the last element – background.

Let us examine these elements a little more closely and see how they are used by Chekhov and, what is perhaps more important, how a producer can use them to discover the main themes and, particularly, the ruling idea of a Chekhov play.

The 'messenger' element is perhaps the most difficult one to manage satisfactorily, that is to say, without distracting the attention of the audience from the dramatic action on the stage; and Chekhov's great art as a playwright is best revealed in the superb way in which he manages his 'messenger' scenes. A good illustration of this is the opening scene of *The Three Sisters*, where the messenger part is divided between the three heroines, the narrative being used in addition for the delineation of character, and in the opening scene of *The Cherry Orchard*, where Chekhov uses the same method. The remarkable fact about *The Seagull* is that Chekhov completely dispenses with the 'messenger' element in the first three acts, using it only in the fourth act, where Dr Dorn's and Konstantin Treplyov's narratives rather tend to impede the (supposedly absent) action.

The arrival and departure element in a Chekhov play is so well known that it is hardly necessary to enlarge on it. It is, as a matter of fact, the only element a producer makes full use of as a function of action.

It can hardly be claimed, however, that he does justice to the chorus element which is one of the most characteristic features of a play of indirect action, although in a modern play of this type it may be disguised by the fact that instead of having a special actor for the part, as in the Greek plays, it is usually assigned to one or more of the characters. Chekhov manages the chorus parts in his plays

with consummate skill. Indeed, he makes the comments of the chorus on the life of the characters and its moral judgment truly an integral part of the play, as Aristotle urged the Greek playwrights to make them. For he distributes the chorus element among several of the characters who, as it were, assume the mantle of the chorus always at the right moment, when, that is, their inner life suddenly overflows in a flood of words, or sometimes even in sound, as, for instance, the famous tum-tee-tum of Vershinin and Masha in *The Three Sisters*. It is this spontaneous and almost palpable transformation of thought into speech that is perhaps the most subtle expression of dramatic action in a Chekhov play, which, if not treated as such on the stage, is liable to transform the chorus parts in a Chekhov play into static, isolated, and disconnected statements of opinion.

The most important element of emotional interest in the drama of indirect action is *peripetia*, the reversal of situation which, as Aristotle says, 'arises from the internal structure of the plot so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action.' Aristotle illustrates this element by a reference to *Oedipus* where, he writes, 'the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus and free him from his anxiety about his mother, but by revealing who he (Oedipus) is, produces the opposite effect.' This is the simplest and, no doubt, the most effective example of *peripetia*. In modern plays of the indirect action type, however, this element assumes much more subtle forms, and it is not an infrequent occurrence for even an experienced producer to misinterpret it and ruin the play. This is what actually happened with the first Moscow Art Theatre production of *The Seagull*, at least in the opinion of the only man who matters, namely, Chekhov.

The Moscow Art Theatre production of *The Seagull*, as is well known, was a great success, and not only launched this theatre on the road to international fame, but was also responsible for the fact that Chekhov, who had made up his mind to give up writing for the stage after the failure of

*The Seagull* in Petersburg, changed his mind and gave us his last three great plays. But the success of *The Seagull* in Moscow was due to all sorts of causes, and not in the least to the fact that Stanislavsky, who was mainly responsible for its production, realized that the most essential condition for the success of a play of this sort is to give a physical expression to the action inherent in its dialogue. That was why in his first productions of Chekhov's plays, Stanislavsky cluttered up the stage with all sorts of objects in order to force the actor to *act* his dialogue by making it impossible for him to move without *doing something*.

The revival of *The Seagull*, however, was a failure, and the play never regained its popularity on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre and was taken off its repertoire after only forty-five performances, as compared with the 635 performances of *The Cherry Orchard*, the 334 performances of *The Three Sisters*, the 320 performances of *Uncle Vanya*, and even the 110 performances of *Ivanov*, during the five seasons between 1898 and 1906.

Chekhov himself never saw the performance of *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre. He only saw it at the beginning of May, 1899, after his arrival in Moscow from Yalta, at a performance specially arranged for him. Olga Knipper, who later became Chekhov's wife and who played Arkadina in the first performance of *The Seagull*, has given us this account of Chekhov's behaviour after the last act of the play: 'Chekhov, the mild, well-mannered Chekhov, walked on the stage with his watch in his hand, looking very pale and grave, and declared in a very firm voice that everything was excellent, only "I suggest that my play should end with the third act: I will not permit you to play the fourth act!"' And Knipper ends her account with these surely highly significant words: 'Chekhov was very excited and told us that the fourth act was not from his play.'

What happened to make Chekhov so excited and threaten such drastic action *after* the great success of his play? What happened was that the two producers, Stanislavsky



and Nemirovich-Danchenko, failed to appreciate the importance of the peripetia element in the play, and this failure to appreciate one of the most significant elements in the drama of indirect action is also responsible for the singular lack of success of *The Seagull* on the Russian stage in general.

Where does the element of peripetia come in in *The Seagull*? It comes in in the inner development of the character of the protagonists of the play – Konstantin and Nina – and it has nothing whatever to do with their unhappy love affair. In Konstantin's case it deals with his most powerful passion – his desire to become a great writer; in Nina's case it deals with her most powerful passion – her desire to become a great actress. The whole play, in fact, deals with one of the most important problems in art – what makes a creative artist? The symbolism of the play expressed in the 'seagull' theme, applies only outwardly to Nina. It is only a poetic way of expressing the very common fact of life, namely, the destruction of beauty by people who do not see it and are not even dimly aware of it, so that they do not know what a terrible crime they commit. Konstantin shoots down the seagull just because he has nothing to do; Trigorin nearly ruins Nina's life and her stage career just because of a chance meeting, a selfish whim, a passing infatuation; Arkadina tramples on and utterly destroys the spark of genius in her son because she is entirely unaware of it and, indeed, quite incapable of appreciating it.

Let us examine in greater detail how this element is worked out by Chekhov in his two characters. In the first act we find Konstantin talking very confidently, and indeed almost hysterically, of the new forms in art, but in the last act we see a complete reversal of the situation: Konstantin becomes more and more convinced that, as he says, 'it isn't old or new forms that matter; what matters is that one should write without thinking of any forms at all, and that whatever one has to say should come straight from the heart.' When one considers how much his belief in new forms

of artistic expression meant to Konstantin and how truly dramatic Chekhov has made this passionate desire of his to prove to everybody and, above all, to his mother, that he was right in holding such a belief, this sudden acknowledgment of his mistake is perhaps one of the most tragic moments of self-illumination in all Chekhov plays, foreshadowing, as it does, the inevitable tragedy that is to take place so soon. Chekhov has here invested a purely literary theme with the attributes of high drama, providing, through the element of peripetia, one of the greatest surprises in the whole play, and the failure of a producer to realize the dramatic significance of this, and to bring it out in the performance must inevitably mar the play as a whole.

But the element of the reversal of the situation is even more important in the case of Nina. At the beginning of the play, Nina, who is to be the sole performer in Konstantin's 'advanced' play, is very excited about her coming appearance on the stage, hoping to impress Arkadina, a famous actress, and, above all, Trigorin, a celebrated novelist and playwright, whose writings she admires and with whom, in fact, she is already in love. Her mild girlish affair with Konstantin bores her, and it is with unconcealed reluctance that she allows him to kiss her.

A little digression on the nature of the two kisses in the play may not be out of place here. In the first act Nina's kiss is not only reluctant; it must reveal to the audience in a flash the true nature of her feelings for Konstantin, whose play she despises and whose theories on art make no impression on her whatever. Nina's second kiss in the third act is her first *real* kiss, and must reveal to the audience that, so far as she is concerned, it is not just a young girl's 'crush' on a middle-aged celebrity, but true love. This is only another instance of how extraordinarily dramatic the action of the play is

When the moment of Nina's appearance on the stage comes, her utter inexperience and nervousness practically kill Konstantin's play even before Arkadina's unfortunate

interjection after Dr Dorn had taken off his hat to mop his brow. Nina's total inexperience of the stage is of vital importance here, if we are to appreciate the change in her acting of the first part of Konstantin's play in the last act, and believe in her, as Chekhov undoubtedly wants us to, as a future great actress. It is, however, usual for the actress playing Nina to recite her monologue in a way that leaves no doubt in the mind of the spectator that it is an accomplished actress who is doing it. This is what actually happened at the first performance of the play at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg, which was such a frightful flop. Chekhov pointed out at the time to Kommissarzhevskaya, the great Russian actress who played Nina, that 'Nina is a young girl who finds herself for the first time on a stage, who suffers from stage-fright, and is very nervous.' The significance of this remark seems to have escaped the producers, and the play is still acted, on the English stage, at any rate, in a way that does not bring out Nina's inexperience as an actress, an oversight that is bound to result, as we shall see presently, in the distortion of the main theme of the play.

In the fourth act Nina comes back an entirely different person from the girl we have seen in the first three acts. A complete reversal of the situation has occurred: Nina has become an actress, and is on the way to becoming a great actress. The amazing fact is that this reversal of the situation is completely overlooked by producers, who thereby reduce the whole level of the play to a sentimental love story that has gone wrong, and that in spite of the well-known fact that Chekhov loathed sentimentality of any sort.

What is the theme of the play as they see it, so far as Nina is concerned? The late Professor Elton, in a paper on Chekhov, gives this conventional summing up of Nina's character which is so typical of an English production of the play: 'Nina,' he writes, 'is a stage-struck girl, who has been blandished by the second-rate celebrated author Trigorin, and misled into the wrong profession. She becomes an

actress and finds she is a poor one.' Professor Elton does not tell us who has misled Nina into the wrong profession or what justification there is for the view that Nina considers herself a poor actress. The whole point of the play, surely, is that Konstantin, starting with his grandiose ideas about the great name he was going to make for himself as a writer, at last realizes that he is a failure; while Nina, who makes such a frightful mess at the very start of her stage career, at last realizes that she is on the way to becoming a great actress, and that, moreover – and this is of course the great message of the play – only he can become a great artist who does not allow himself to be discouraged by disasters in his private life and who knows how to endure suffering and transmute it into art. This point is of the utmost importance to the understanding of *The Seagull* as well as of Chekhov, who, whatever the believers in the Chekhov 'legend' may think or say, was certainly not a prophet of resignation.

Indeed, in the fourth act Nina, distracted as she is, makes it quite clear that she is not the silly girl Stanislavsky had taken her to be when, at the beginning of his career, he produced *The Seagull*.

'I'm different now,' she tells Konstantin. 'I'm a real actress now. I enjoy my acting. I revel in it. The stage intoxicates me. When I'm on it, I feel that I am beautiful.' And she finishes her long speech with this avowal of her faith in art: 'Now I know, my dear, now I understand that in our calling, whether we are writers or actors, what really matters is not fame, nor glory, nor any of the things I used to dream of. What matters is knowing how to endure, how to bear your cross – and have faith. I have faith, and that is why nothing can hurt me so much any more, and when I think of my calling, I am no longer afraid of life.'

To which Konstantin at once replies sorrowfully that she, Nina, has found her true purpose in life, while he is still lost in a maze of images and dreams.

Here, therefore, we have a complete reversal of the situation, and Chekhov, indeed, immediately proceeds to prove

to the audience that Nina is not boasting about her being a good actress by making her recite part of her soliloquy in Konstantin's play. It must be obvious that if Nina's rendering of the words of the play within the play does not differ from her first rendering of them, the whole dramatic significance of the peripetia element is lost, and the main theme of the play ruined into the bargain.

Nina's last speech, no doubt, requires the finest possible acting because of her rapid changes of mood, the sudden pangs of agony she suffers when she discovers that Trigorin, whom she still loves, is in the next room, and the poignant memories which her visit to Sorin's country-house awaken in her, but that does not alter the fact of her complete transformation, of her spiritual rebirth, and of her faith in herself as an actress.

Their failure to grasp the significance of the peripetia element in the play resulted in a complete misinterpretation of this important scene by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, and afterwards in Chekhov's declaration that the fourth act was not from his play. After the success of the play Nemirovich-Danchenko wrote to Chekhov that the actress who played Nina was the weakest in the cast. 'It was partly Alexeyev's fault (Stanislavsky was Alexeyev's stage name),' he wrote, 'for confusing her by making her play a kind of a silly fool. I got angry with her and told her to go back to her first lyrical way of acting. So she got all muddled up.' But how is an actress not to get muddled up if, instead of having her part interpreted to her intelligently, she is told to act 'lyrically'?

How is it that Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko were guilty of such a blunder? So far as Stanislavsky is concerned, he himself afterwards confessed that he did not understand *The Seagull*. The play, he told his fellow producer, Nemirovich-Danchenko, appeared to him 'a sort of half and half, the passions not effective, and the characters incapable of supplying the actors with good stage material.' Stanislavsky was then at the very beginning of his career as



producer and actor and he showed, according to Nemirovich-Danchenko, an unmistakable predilection for the classics, or, in other words, for the drama of direct action. As for Nemirovich-Danchenko, he had a profound admiration for Chekhov's genius and without his encouragement and constant badgering Chekhov would most probably have stuck to his decision not to write any more plays; but he seems to have missed the point of Nina's last speech for the same reason as many another Russian producer, right up to the present day, seems to have missed it. The cause of this curious misunderstanding shows how one word is sometimes enough to mislead a producer. Nina finishes her long speech in the last act with a strongly evocative word which, unfortunately, is more commonly used with a different connotation from that in which Chekhov used it. What Nina says is, *Ya veruyu ee mnye nye tak bol'no*, which is more likely to convey the meaning of 'I believe in God and nothing can hurt me so much any more' than what Chekhov undoubtedly meant, namely, 'I have faith and that is why nothing can hurt me so much any more,' the noun *vera* and the first person singular of its verb *veruyu* being most commonly used in the sense of religion and 'I believe in God.' This religious tinge of the phrase, especially as it is preceded by another religious metaphor of bearing the cross, had the unfortunate result of distorting Nina's meaning, and one can't help feeling that Stanislavsky's direction to the actress to play Nina as though she were a silly fool was due to this. It is only quite recently that Russian critics have begun pointing out that the whole significance of Nina's speech lies in the word *veruyu*, that is to say, in her profession of faith in her art.

The misinterpretation of this scene by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, due to their failure to grasp the importance of the peripetia element, also led them to delete one of the most pregnant sentences in Nina's speech: 'I am a seagull – no, that's not it – I am an actress – yes, that's it!'

If one single word could produce an association of ideas conflicting with those the author wanted to convey and in this way endanger the continuous success of a play, what can happen to a Chekhov play when his dialogue has to be entirely transfused into the medium of another language? What can and does happen to Chekhov plays in English translations will become apparent if we consider the nature of Chekhov's dramatic dialogue. It can be taken as an axiom that the difference between a playwright's and a novelist's dialogues is that the words put into the mouths of his characters by a playwright, to be spoken by actors from the stage, must be a great deal more evocative than those used by a novelist in his dialogue. For unless the dialogue of a playwright is 'dramatic' in the sense that it can hold the attention of the spectator in spite of the fraction of time it takes the actor to say his words, it might as well have remained unspoken. This very simple fact is not always grasped by a novelist who decides to turn playwright, very often simply because he is incapable of differentiating between dramatic and undramatic dialogue. Chekhov, however, not only grasped the importance of dramatic dialogue; realizing that his type of play of indirect action demands a kind of dialogue that is even more evocative than the dialogue of the writer of plays of direct action, he took great pains to intensify the evocative powers of the words he used in his plays. An example which even those who do not know Russian should be able to follow will perhaps best explain this. In *The Cherry Orchard*, Yepikhodov, the book-keeper on Mrs Ranevsky's estate, is a broadly drawn farcical character of a conceited halfwit who imagines himself a highly educated man because he possesses the bovine patience to wade through 'learned' books he has not the brains to understand. A character like that is not difficult to draw, and, indeed, has been drawn in every conceivable way in English, French, and Russian drama. But the way Chekhov has drawn him by the dialogue he makes him use is typical of Chekhov's dramatic dialogue in general. To

begin with, the book Chekhov makes Yepikhodov read is a book that had been a best-seller in Russia for years and that everyone in the audience could be presumed to have read. It is *The History of English Civilization*, by Henry Thomas Buckle, which enjoyed a tremendous popularity in Russia towards the end of the nineteenth century and is mentioned not only in the works of Chekhov, but also in those of Dostoyevsky and other great Russian novelists. What Chekhov does next is highly characteristic. Instead of parodying Yepikhodov's 'learned' fatuities, he simply takes typical sentences out of Buckle and strings them together so as to fit them into the play, conveying at the same time the utter idiocy of the prig of a book-keeper. Some turns of Yepikhodov's speech seem to have puzzled many an anxious English student of the original text of Chekhov's play, but anyone who takes the trouble to read a page or two of Buckle's *History* need be puzzled no longer, for all those turns of speech are there as large as life. What Chekhov did in the case of such a broadly farcical figure as Yepikhodov, he did in a much more subtle way in the case of all his characters, that is to say, he enormously intensified the evocative powers of their speeches by a prodigal use of 'literary echoes' from Russian classics that were so familiar to his audience that they were sure to evoke a whole swarm of sensations similar to those his characters experienced, and in this way make his audience apprehend emotionally the state of mind of his characters. A good example of this is Masha's repetition of two lines from Pushkin's poem *Russlan and Lyudmila* at the end of the first act of *The Three Sisters*. No translation of these two lines, torn from a context that is completely unfamiliar to an educated Englishman or American, can possibly convey Masha's mood when she dimly perceives the stirrings of a great passion in her and is annoyed with herself for mumbling words the significance of which she is as yet unable to grasp. There are hundreds of less obvious, though scarcely less important, instances of that kind. But these 'literary echoes', trans-

lated as they stand, as they invariably are translated, are bound to give rise to a feeling that not only Chekhov's characters, but Russians in general, are a very curious kind of people. Unfortunately, the idea that Chekhov's plays are full of quite harmless but crazy people, due to the inability of the translator to recognize, let alone cope with, the 'literary echoes' in the text of his plays, is further magnified by a producer's inability to deal with the 'chorus' element which is so typical of a Chekhov play. This is also true of the peripetia element which is the main *functional* element in a Chekhov play and, as such, is usually suggested in its title. It is, that is to say, the key to the discovery of the ruling idea of the play and of what Stanislavsky calls its 'through-action', or the main theme that forms, as it were, its backbone. Even a superficial analysis of *The Cherry Orchard* will show how the peripetia element, if logically studied in the development of the Lopakhin-Ranevsky part of the plot, can deepen a producer's understanding of the psychology of the main characters of the play.

The last element in the play of indirect action, which ought to be kept in mind when dealing with a Chekhov play, is its background.

By 'background' I do not mean what the Russians call *byt*, that is to say, the characteristic details of everyday life of the Chekhov characters, which every producer of his plays must have at his finger-tips, anyhow. What I mean is the background against which Chekhov places his plays and which lends additional depth to them. This background will, as a rule, be found to be another well-known play, for instance *Hamlet* in the case of *The Seagull*, or Ostrovsky's *Forest* in the case of *The Cherry Orchard*. It was W. B. Yeats who observed that 'the old playwrights took old subjects, and did not even arrange the subject in a new way, because they were absorbed in expression, that is to say, in what is most near and delicate.' Chekhov certainly did arrange the old subject in a new way, but he too preferred to choose an old subject as the background of his plays

because, like the old dramatists, he was absorbed in expression, in what was most near and delicate.

As a rule, this background is always present in a Chekhov play, though it may not be always so easy to detect. In *The Seagull*, however, it is very prominent, indeed. There is, for example, 'the play within the play,' which, as in *Hamlet*, comes to an abortive end because of the storms it arouses. But, as a matter of fact, the very first line in the play, spoken by Medvyedenko to Masha, 'Why do you always go about in black?' gives us the clue to the presence of this characteristic element. It is the *Hamlet* motif which manifests itself in all sorts of delicate variations, rising to a crescendo just before the curtain goes up on the play within the play in the first act and again in the Arkadina-Konstantin scene in the third. In the first act, indeed, Chekhov comes out into the open and reveals to the spectator not only the relationship between Arkadina and Trigorin, but also between Arkadina and her son Konstantin by two quotations from *Hamlet*. Arkadina, the famous actress, who, as Chekhov pointed out at one of the rehearsals of the play in Petersburg, is 'a foolish, mendacious, self-admiring egoist,' does not dream that when she turns mockingly to Konstantin and recites Queen Gertrude's lines —

O Hamlet speak no more;  
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
And there I see such black and grained spots  
As will not leave their tinct —

her son, who deeply resents her relationship with Trigorin, would turn furiously on her and her lover with Hamlet's withering words —

Nay, but to live  
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,  
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love  
Over the nasty sty.



Konstantin's 'mother fixation', in fact, was as great as Hamlet's, and as disastrous to him in the end. This first outburst prepares us also for his pathetic, 'Why, oh why, mother, are you so much under the influence of that man?' in the third act, just when he should, surely, have encouraged his mother to take Trigorin away from Nina, an outburst which clearly shows how deep-seated this 'fixation' was.

The importance of these two quotations from Hamlet for the development of the inner action of the play is obvious enough. Yet we find that some translators of the play leave out Konstantin's Hamlet lines altogether, while Constance Garnett substitutes for them the utterly irrelevant lines – 'And let me wring your heart, for so I shall, if it be made of penetrable stuff,' which shows a complete confusion in the mind of the translator and no awareness at all of the importance of the *Hamlet*, or rather Gertrude-Hamlet, theme in the development of the play.

These are therefore the main basic elements through which the functions of action are expressed in a Chekhov play. Where Chekhov's genius as a playwright, however, finds its most brilliant expression is in the entirely original form he gave to the indirect action type of drama by a completely new and infinitely subtle combination of its basic elements, and it is this sense that Chekhov can be said to be one of the greatest innovators in modern drama. As for the almost limitless scope Chekhov's dramatic art gives to the actor and producer, I can only quote Stanislavsky who towards the end of his life said that though he had acted a certain part in a Chekhov play hundreds of times, he always discovered new depths in it whenever he came to act it again.

*Jacquetta Hawkes*

## ART IN THE CRYSTALLINE SOCIETY

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A tree is a society of specialized individual cells bound together for a common end. It cannot be divided and still retain the qualities of a tree. Nourishment sucked through the roots is carried to the leaves and blossoms; that absorbed through the leaf chlorophyll is necessary to the trunk and roots. Strip the leaves, ring the bark, cut the roots and the tree will die. From the lowest rootlet in perpetual darkness to the point of leaf or petal nearest to the sun, it is a society growing mysteriously towards its appropriate shape in the matrix of the world. It will propagate and die. A crystal also has its appropriate shape, a mathematically perfect one, but it does not attain it by the unified energy of many parts, each with its own character and function. A crystal is built from smaller particles that are identical with itself except in size, identical with one another, and without vital relationship between themselves. None, except the viruses, those forms on the frontier between life and inorganic matter, can reproduce itself or die. Divide a crystal and you obtain a number of crystals.

These elaborate images evoke with useful if irritating exaggeration the difference between the organic type of society in which men have lived for the past hundred thousand years and the inorganic structure towards which we seem now to be moving. It is extraordinarily hard to convey the meaning of the new forms in terms of human life. Essentially it means the isolation of the individual, not in the sense of giving him solitude – on the contrary, solitude is destroyed – but in the sense that one particle of the crystal is isolated in having no vital relationship with the next. The individual has no neighbourhood and no neighbours; it seems symptomatic of such a society that labour should be ‘directed’. Although without locality the new individual

lacks the unattached man's sense of holding his life as a growing thing between his hands; he stands always with his head turned over his shoulder listening to the words that ceaselessly invade the privacy of his mind as they pour from his state, his unknown boss, his entertainers, his newspaper. The words that have so largely taken the place of experience.

One night during the war I was walking along a quiet back-street when a door opened and a crowd of uniformed A.T.S. girls gouted onto the pavement. They filled the darkness with frighteningly impersonal laughter and screams; they exchanged a hundred times the three or four standard phrases of the moment as they pushed and jostled back to their barracks. Next day no doubt they would be marching as one man in a series of intricate but meaningless patterns. A few would show extraordinary skill in handling mechanical instruments. These I took to be the raw material of the new society.

One day during the war I was walking along a corridor in Whitehall when a door opened and a dozen Permanent Secretaries of government departments came out from a meeting on peace aims and post-war reconstruction. They all wore dark suits and were putting on black hats. They were all obviously clever men and so far as their official existence was concerned entirely without life or hope. They were as full of words as a cistern is of water. These I took to represent the forces controlling the new society, as blind and as helpless as the particles they moved.

In such a society experience must be more and more atomized. With religion it has lost the motive for uniting itself with the universe, and with art one of the chief instruments for achieving that union. Men looking up at the stars will not see the great symbolic constellations drawn there, but only an infinite regress of meaningless worlds. Soon they will prefer not to look. That might symbolize the death of art.

This is enough of daubing in an attempt to convey my meaning by caricature. I want to attempt a sober account

of the history of the crystalline society and of the reasons why art cannot flourish in it and may well die.

Although it is right to confess, to caricaturing, I believe that many people will admit that a deep change is moving society in the direction that I have suggested. Many, too, will agree that the prime cause is to be found in the new type of thinking that we have developed since the Renaissance. This mental revolution may be said to be from the intuitive and mythopoeic to the analytical method of thought. The first, as has been said of the poetic image, is the human mind 'claiming kinship with all that is or has been'; it implies the habit of seeing the world in a grain of sand. The new method seeks to gain control of the grain of sand by breaking it into molecules and atoms. Their two mottoes might be *Divide to Rule* and *Unify to Understand*. Or, if a proverb is wanted, 'You can't see the wood after cutting down the trees.'

Nothing can usefully be said about the position of the artist and his work in the new type of society in which these modes of thought are prevalent without first attempting to decide what an artist is and what he does both as an individual and as a member of society. This is an enquiry that is likely to have one kind of result if an absolute definition is sought, quite another if instead the approach is historical. Croce, for instance, and Jane Harrison, seem hardly to be talking the same language. Yet for a proper understanding it is necessary that the two should be fused.

The absolute, philosophical view that I accept here is that all art is the re-expression through the fire of the artist's imagination of impressions intuitively received from the outer world. Each impression or *sensum* has its emotional charge, and the outer world can, of course, include the world of thought. The imagination lies functionally between simple consciousness and the activity of noetic thought – the working of that apollonian intellect that has given rise to the analytical modes of the crystalline society. It is the imagination that is creative, that imposes form on

the emotionally charged *sensa* and so issues the images and symbols that are, as it were, signals sent back to the external world. This essential aesthetic creative act is inward, 'the tune in the head', it has to be followed by the artistic act, the wilful fixing of the imaginative expressions in words, colour, line, notation and the rest.

What is it, then, that distinguishes the artist of genius from other perceptive and imaginative people? Here I think that by far the most illuminating conception is Blake's 'energy', the energy that is opposed to reason and puts the true poet in the Devil's party. It is the same force that Schopenhauer in his superb chapter on Genius describes as a surplus of perceptive energy beyond that required for the purposes of the will. It is a spiritual *eros* that results in spiritual creation as certainly as physical love, to which it is intimately related, results in physical creation.

The social aspect of this passionately individual process arises from the fact that the artist shares his vision of the outer world with anyone capable of receiving it and re-creating it in his own imagination. The historical interpretation will show that while in simple societies this sharing is automatic and complete, the artist being hardly if at all differentiated from his fellows, as the structure grows more complicated not only does the artist become a specialist but there is a powerful tendency for his work to become inaccessible to a large part of his society. This in the past has been largely checked by the existence of some unifying ideal such as Christianity has given Western Civilization, that keeps the door of communication at least ajar.

I want now to relate this outline of an absolute, timeless definition of art with an appropriate historical interpretation and then to pursue the historical development through time until it has in fact led to an exposure of the present predicament of the arts in our crystallizing society.

The idea that in its origins art is closely related to ritual has become so familiar that it is hard to recapture the sense of daring with which it was expounded by Jane Harrison.



She was writing at a time when the issue was confused from one side by the Aesthetes' devotion to art as the pursuit of beauty for pleasure, and from the other by some vague confusion of ethics with religion and a certainty that art was immoral and therefore irreligious.

Perhaps instead of saying as Jane Harrison did that art grew out of ritual, it would be more in harmony with the definition of art that has been adopted to say that both had the same source in the lower levels of consciousness and in the subconscious. That source is the desire for reunion with the external world either physically or intuitively perceived; a union to be achieved through an intense sympathetic imitation. At this level of simple consciousness ritual stops, or, if it develops, it is towards the activities intended to influence the external world that are found in magic and religion. Art, on the other hand, by raising them to the level of the imagination, gives the intuitions of unity form and, through the practical artistic act, permanence.

Historically it seems that the rites that were most generally associated with early manifestations of art were those of the resurrection cults of the Great Mother, and subsequently the Great Mother and her son: Isis-Osiris-Horus, Ishtar and Tammuz and the many other personifications. So widespread are these cults and the rituals and art forms connected with them, that it has been possible for Robert Graves to accept them as the one true source of poetry. Certainly they are widespread and deeply rooted in the individual subconscious. In its primitive form, already inspiring sculpture in the palaeolithic age, the cult of the Great Mother represents the universal desire of the human being, isolated by his selfconsciousness, for return to the primal substance and for rebirth. The later forms in which the son element is added sprang from the basic desire of any people whose life depended on seeing the corn sprout from the dead seed, leaves appear on naked branches. The contribution of these cults to the sources of poetry and the other arts was important, but it cannot have been in any sense unique. To

go no further from their historical roots than the Old Stone Age, among the artistically most gifted of the palaeolithic hunters desire, and therefore emotional sympathy, was concentrated on the animals that had to be killed for food; so it was that they dressed themselves in the skins and horns of deer and bison to perform ritual dances, while at the same time they painted the beasts on cave walls, heightening every characteristic from the force of an eager imagination.

What is really significant is that here near its inception, art is found as an activity easily reconcilable with the absolute definition that I have adopted. An energetic desire, *eros*, for communion with the exterior world leading to an emotional perception, an imaginative re-expression and its physical rendering with practical skill.

It is apparent, too, that as art and ritual gush up from the same source, art like ritual is accepted as an urgent necessity for the whole community. In a primitive society the artist himself is not usually a specialist although presumably with such exceptional outbursts as that of palæolithic cave art, gifted individuals must have been recognized and perhaps given economic privileges. If by the time that the civilizations of the ancient world were established the creative arts had become to some extent a specialized function – of the craftsman at one extreme and the priest at the other – the creators remained wholly within the unity of their society. They intensified and expressed the desires of the community and were necessary agents for its participation in the exterior world, a purpose for which they were able to use traditional symbols universally understood. More important still, there was no difference between the artist's mode of perception and expression and that of his fellows. Everyone shared the intuitive habits of thought inevitable to the artist.

At this point I feel obliged to make an awkward excursion from my general historical argument in order to round up some particular historical events that affected the formative period of Western Civilization and so are a necessary part

of any understanding of the present situation. It is familiar history that towards the end of the second millennium before Christ, when the peace of Bronze Age Europe was being disturbed by the migrations of Indo-European peoples, successive waves of invaders pushed down into Greece. These northern invaders at first modified and then largely destroyed the heritage of Minoan civilization and with it dethroned the Great Goddess whom the Cretans had so greatly honoured. The Greek tribes themselves, cut off as wandering peoples must be from all the deep associations of their local divinities and rituals, had come to see their gods as heroic individuals, the divine counterpart of their own masculine, warrior society. So, for a time, the Olympians had it all their own way, and the bards singing in the great halls served this individualistic Homeric ideal. But Zeus was not left unchallenged. The old needs and the old satisfactions thrust up again in the shape of Dionysian and Orphic cults that represent the revival in full force of the young god of seasonal resurrection. As for the Great Goddess herself, she had of course been found place in the Olympian pantheon under a variety of names – Hera, Artemis, Athena, Demeter – she was always there at need.

It is at least part of the truth to say that from that time until recently the arts depended largely upon these two forces. A religious tradition that was communal and intuitive with roots deep in both human history and the subconscious, and a heroic, later an aristocratic, tradition inspired by strong personal loyalties and with a contrary tendency towards individualism and apollonian intellectual ideals.

Athens had remained sheltered from the force of the northern invasions, and it was there that one of the sources of our civilization was created by a grafting of one tradition upon the other with a precision that gives it an almost symbolic quality. It seems to have been a deliberate act of policy on the part of Peisistratos to take an already enfeebled seasonal rite, the Dionysian festival of the New Year, and to

impose upon it the enactment of the Homeric legends. So Greek drama was born and the visual arts found fresh inspiration. It must always be astonishing to think with what speed a lately tribal society of anonymous artists and communal rituals developed an intellectual and artistic élite with famous poets, dramatists and sculptors transforming ancient symbolism and myth through the power of individual imagination. Yet because it was a small and gifted society supported by slave labour, and because the underlying symbols and stories were commonly known and understood, this was one of those rare and happy periods when the artistic achievement of individual genius was still the significant possession of a whole society.

Whether it was for better or for worse that Greek thought failed to develop, as it so easily might have done, along the lines of scientific analysis is a matter for disagreement. As it was, it turned, or was directed, into other channels and Caesar had to invade Britain without an aeroplane or even so much as a steamship to help him. It is a matter for perhaps even deeper disagreement whether it was for better or for worse that the classical world was Christianized and then overrun by barbarians, but I think that it must be accepted that the resulting return to a heroic and non-urban way of life, and above all the building of Christendom, effectively prevented the threatened isolation of the artist. The survival of the ancient seasonal myths and customs, a military aristocracy now softened by the ideals of chivalry, and a single religious faith in which Mary and Christ came increasingly near to satisfying the traditional needs of the simple, together produced a well-founded, earthy society in which the accepted values were spiritual and an anonymous art remained a necessary part of life.

When the Renaissance and its glorification of the individual had ended this unity for good, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a 'secularization of political theory' that was, as Professor Tawney has said, 'the most momentous of the intellectual changes which ushered in

the modern world.' No longer could social institutions remain as Thomas Aquinas had seen them, 'the imperfect expression of a supreme spiritual reality.'

After another brief age comparable to that of Athens in that it seems to have enjoyed much of the best of two worlds, the great division grew fast. In this country the civil wars make a symbolic break. The old fertility cults so long tolerated or overlooked were being eradicated by fanatical witch-hunts and by the banning of the maypole and other related customs; in 1648 ballad singers were forbidden and vast numbers of musical instruments destroyed by decree, and a year later the last wholehearted divine king was beheaded in Whitehall. It is worth recalling a small but pointed detail: before the end of the seventeenth century the Emblem books that for a hundred years had represented the mythopœic habit of thought made self-conscious by intellectual communications, had died out in censure and ridicule.

As inevitably as the Dionysian and Orphic cults made their reaction to an earlier Apollonian domination, Romanticism rose against the intellectual triumph of the Augustan Age; rattling bones and striving for the unobtainable from jagged mountain tops it rebelled against the 'Good ... the impassive that obeys reason.' If the revolutionary element in the movement showed a concern for the reintegration of society that would certainly involve the arts, the brutal facts of the industrial revolution overtook them too fast. It was one thing to admire the Lakeland countrymen and to feel that the Mighty Being stirred among them, it was another to feel unity with an urban proletariat. Soon the first impetuous jet of the movement was led into reasonable bourgeois hosepipes. As for the pre-Raphaelites, Morris, and all those who looked to the past, they could not return. The way had long been blocked. Those who, on the contrary, embraced the new modes developed an exquisitely false æsthetic hedonism. Walter Pater stated it most clearly: 'The aesthetic critic, then, regards all the objects with



which he has to do ... as forces producing pleasurable sensations. This influence he feels and wishes to explain by analysing and reducing it to its elements. ... His end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue and noted it, as a chemist notes some natural element.' 'To regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought,' and so he goes on to the chemical processes of our physical life, to violets growing from dead bodies and the hard, gem-like flame.

When the social framework finally collapsed after 1914, the hard gem-like flame had no sheltered coigns in which to burn. It was left to the new writers of the twenties and thirties with their helpless re-awakening to the social aspects of art to determine that if they could not write for the people, and God knows they could not, then they would write about them. The people, meanwhile, had established their own forms of hedonism, and they were not æsthetic forms.

So history has led directly to the present problems of the arts in our rapidly crystallizing society. At least that history has made it clear what the main problems must be. Evidently the greatest is that the artist, if he is an artist and not merely a sensitive intellectual, is working on a level of consciousness that has been forsaken by nearly all his fellow citizens. Charles Darwin lamented that after half a lifetime devoted to scientific thought he had completely lost his youthful enjoyment of the arts. Most people are not even aware of loss.

Cut off from the country and its rhythms, occupied with tasks that make no demands on the senses or the imagination, and living in a society that has destroyed both religious symbolism and the heroic loyalties, the ordinary people cannot respond to the arts. Among the educated the intellect has usually been developed at the expense of their intuitive and imaginative powers. Indeed, R. G. Collingwood has observed that 'the habit of sterilizing *sensa* by ignoring their emotional charge is not equally prevalent

among all sorts and conditions of men. It seems to be especially characteristic of adult and "educated" people in what is called modern European civilization; among them it is more developed in men than in women, and less in artists than in others.' Here is the cause of the ugliness that is the greatest innovation of our age. People so afflicted can accurately be described as senseless.

The second great problem for the artist is caused by the collapse of organic social life. Art should be put out like flowers by a city, a court, a tribe, a small self-conscious class – any unity with significant human relationships and some vital force and accepted ideal. At the present time not only have both Christianity and the remnants of the aristocracy been made impotent, but all those smaller organisms that checked the formation of crystalline masses, units of local government and local consciousness of every kind, are fatally weakened and losing their power of creation. This lack of organism allows the artist no social function and has brought about the general belief that art is no more than an unnecessary ornament tacked on to the edge of life.

The combined effect of these two conditions is to condemn the artist to an unnatural isolation. His position in society as a whole is like that of a priest in a tolerant but wholly atheistical state. He cannot be understood and he is not wanted. The cultivation of his best gifts imposes a serious economic and social handicap. Introversion and dependence upon an excessively personal symbolism are the least of the evils forced upon him. Working for a very small yet incoherent public provokes a nervous striving after originality that must drive all but the Sir Galahads out from their own realm into that of the intellect – a desertion that few members of their public will notice. No wonder that an ingenuous American anthropologist has recently taken it for granted that people of 'artistic temperament' are 'somewhat maladjusted socially ... introverted ... and somewhat difficult.'

This is not the place for any full consideration of the direct effect of science and analytical modes of thought on the artist's own work. The quotation from Pater has recalled one, now long ago reversed; the literary results of psychology in increasing subtlety at the expense of the strength of characterization and narrative are well known. More relevant here is the use of scientific discoveries by certain of the Impressionist painters, for the brilliance of their achievement shows the value of science to the arts if it is held in proper subjection. Camille Pissaro saw the situation whole, with the sound intuitions of a peasant. An anti-clerical and anarchist, he believed uncompromisingly in the artist's dependence on naked sensation: 'Happy are the artists who look at Nature and love it', yet he deeply distrusted any domination by science over the imagination. He describes how on meeting a member of a particular group at an exhibition he 'could not help telling him that their science was humbug ... that they had killed their instincts for the sake of a false science ... that Seurat, who did have ... instinct had destroyed his spontaneity with his cold and dull theory.' Equally, perhaps just because his own origins brought him closer to them, he saw that a modern painter could not go back to the primitive sources of art: 'I saw Gauguin and he assured me that the young would find salvation by replenishing themselves at remote and savage sources. I told him that this art did not belong to him, he was a civilized man.' If the old man's ghost could have walked a recent exhibition '40,000 Years of Modern Art' he would have seen nothing to make him change his mind.

If it is agreed that the position of the arts, and most of all of poetry, in a crystalline society must be perilous and perhaps even untenable, can anything be done to check the process of crystallization? Nobody wants to hear more tags about a change of heart. Yet it seems that materialism must be modified if either the arts or the species is to survive. Somehow the 'secularization of political theory' must be

reversed and social institutions again be seen as expressions, always, no doubt, happily imperfect, of a supreme spiritual reality. It is at least certain that without such a reversal a committee to award honours, or even money, to artists will not help them unless it is a part of an awakening to the importance of their role in society.

Could any such change of values even begin to make itself felt, then many contributory remedies would be justified. Most important would be the delegation of power to many small, organic units, genuine tree-growths held together by personal bonds and not by impersonal forces. If those responsible would attend to even a few of Mr Herbert Read's sermons, then education, too, could push on the revolution by fostering imagination and sparing the intellect.

These are matters for society. One supreme effort can be demanded of the artists themselves. They must forswear either enmity or humility towards science and accept their rightful position as its masters. As the Impressionists did, they can use its discoveries as their tools; but more profoundly they must use them as the stuff for imagination to work upon – as no-one has quite succeeded in doing. Palinurus of the *Unquiet Grave* has already set the first tack of the course: 'To-day the function of the artist is to bring imagination to science and science to imagination, where they meet, in the myth.' It is the task of the next fifty years, the only possible salvation.

*G. S. Fraser*

## SOME NOTES ON POETIC DICTION

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At school, we learn to think of 'poetic diction' as a peculiar vice of eighteenth-century poets, a strikingly hollow and conventional use of language, that came from looking too much at books and too little at nature. Later, if we are sensible people, we begin to wonder whether that is quite a correct account of the matter. Poetry, after all, is never a transcript from common speech. It is always a selective artifice of language. And when Pope writes,

He lifts a tube and levels with his eye.  
Straight a short thunder breaks the frozen sky.  
Oft as the mounting larks their notes prepare  
They fall and leave their little lives in air,

the language, of course, is consciously elegant, but the poet does also seem to have his eye very clearly on his object. 'Tube' gives us a far more vivid and exact picture of the aiming huntsman than 'shotgun' would; the two striking conceits, by which the sky is a sheet of ice shattered by the 'short thunder' of the explosion – an admirably crisp and evocative phrase – and by which the larks rise and fall in a single graceful parabola, leaving their little ghostly twittering lives behind them, these, if they do not give us nature in herself (but does any poetry, in any age?) give us most admirably an age's sensibility to nature.

There is a phrase, of which that age was fond, about the brown shade, or the brown horror of the shade; we will not find the brown horror if we wander through the wood ourselves, for our own painters have taught us to look for a dazzle of broken light and for glittering greens, but we will find it in Poussin and Claude Lorrain. What a poetic diction reflects, in fact, is the general sensibility of a period.



To every good poet, his own diction appears transparent (the most natural way of putting things, given that poetry is an artifice). Poets become aware of a poetic diction as existing just at the moment when it is no longer properly reflecting the age's sensibility; such conventions wear less well in English than in other languages, so that English poetry seems to need, at irregular intervals, to touch the ground if it is to renew its strength. Yet every attempt to bring English poetry back to the tone of natural speech (by Donne, by Dryden, by Wordsworth, or by Eliot) creates in its turn its own conventions. It is in that wider sense that I wish to consider poetic diction; not as a vice of one period, or of bad poets at all periods, but as a certain traditional decorum of language, a necessary convention (and a necessarily changing one) about the use of words in poetry.

A thoughtful American critic, Mr Elder Olson, has lately deplored the attention which criticism pays to diction. It seems to him the least important element in the composition of a poem. 'In one sense, of course,' he writes, 'the words are of the utmost importance; if we do not grasp them, we do not grasp the poem. In another sense, they are the least important elements in the poem, for they do not determine anything in the poem; on the contrary, they are determined by everything else. They are the only things we see or hear; yet they are governed by imperceptible things which are inferred from them. And when we are moved by poetry, we are not moved by words, except in so far as sound and rhythm move us; we are moved by the things that the words stand for.'

I think, on the contrary, that criticism should pay a very close attention to diction. I agree with Mr Allen Tate: 'For in the long run, whatever the poet's philosophy may be, however wide may be the extension of his meaning ... by his language shall you know him.' And I do not find that Mr Olson's sturdy-looking piece of reasoning stands up very well to my regretful probing. In what sense is it true

that we are simply 'moved by the things that the words stand for', and not by the words themselves? Certainly not in any sense in which other words would do as well: in which the fullest paraphrase, or the most intelligent exposition, would be a substitute for the original poem. And certainly not in any sense in which the situation that the poem refers to, if we were capable of imagining that *without* words – if, for instance, we could draw a picture of it – would be a substitute for the original poem, either. Not, that is, in any sense, in which 'the things the words stand for' means merely the kind of physical object, abstract concept, or emotional state at which the words point. The pointing is the least of it.

Let me take the case, since it is the simplest, of a physical object. The word 'rose', in a poem, does not simply point at a rose. As well as pointing, it stretches out. We have come across it in many other poems: 'O Rose, thou art sick,' 'Mignonne, allons voir si la rose', 'There is no rose of swich vertu' ... In poetry, the word thus has come to have a range of subtle associations, with virginity, with sensuality, with youthful female beauty, with the cruel passing of time. It is a word with an emotional charge that does not depend upon our pausing, when we come across it in a poem, to imagine very vividly an actual rose. Admittedly, the thing itself had to be beautiful for the word to acquire these associations; but it may be that now the associations of the word matter more than the beauty of the thing. And admittedly, also, the poet must use some words in a dry, denotative sense; to rely entirely on the emotional associations of words has a blurring and drenching effect, and is a mark of the minor poet. Nevertheless, the practice of poetry at once enriches and unsettles the common meanings of many words, and since the poet uses words with a feeling both for their flavour in an old setting and their aptness in a new, it may be that the kind of word he likes does often determine (whether or not it ideally ought to) the sort of thing he says.

Mr Olson may be intending to allow for all this when he says that words in a poem are governed 'by imperceptible things which are inferred from them.' But a poet's alertness to the atmosphere of words is not inference in any strict, or even in any loose sense, for he does not keep notebooks with lists of the accepted poetical implications of such words as 'rose'. His choice of words is governed not by his reasoning intellect, but by something much more vague and floating, his sensibility to language, his habits of literary response. And that sensibility may either aid or impede these activities of choosing, and thinking, and bringing his full character to bear on his thought and his choice, which for Mr Olson are the really important factors in the composition of a poem. They are really important, but they depend for their full effect on the poet's possession of an adequate diction. To quote Mr Tate again, when we are judging a poet, 'the quality of his language is the valid limit of what he has to say.'

In 1925, when for the general reader the poetic diction of the Georgians was still the accepted convention, Mr Edgell Rickword, in a penetrating essay, pointed out its limiting effect on the range of poetry. One effect of that convention, which he regarded as a result of the triumph of the romantic movement, had been, he wrote, 'to separate the poet from the subjects which abound in ordinary social life and particularly from the emotions engendered by the clash of personality and the hostility of circumstances ... This convention is as dangerous as the distinction which the French classicists draw between noble and vulgar emotions, and has a similar reflection in its effect on the poet's vocabulary – the erection of a literary language.' The language of poetry is, as I have already suggested, always a literary language. However close the written and spoken languages may draw, they never become identical. And the spoken language of cultivated people (which is the natural language that most poets fall back upon) is itself very much affected by current literary conventions. The notion of a

natural language quite unaffected by literature is a figment. The dialogue, for instance, of Mr Hemingway's novels is in as strict a literary convention as that of Miss Compton Burnett's; in real life, his characters would be liable to disturb his 'natural' atmosphere by talking occasionally in a 'literary' way. He obtains his special effect by a process of rigorous and artificial selection from the sort of things people actually say. All imaginative writing is conventional, since it aims, and must aim, at a unity of tone not found in ordinary speech. What Mr Rickword meant was that one literary convention was wearing out, was becoming rigid and inflexible, and too far removed from the spoken language; and that it was time it was replaced by a new convention. In the 1930's, it was.

In this new convention of the 1930's, a liveliness, like that of speech, became more important than a traditional literary dignity. Let me take three typical quotations, almost at random: from Mr Auden,

A bird used to visit this shore:  
It isn't going to come any more.  
I've come a very long way to prove  
No land, no water, and no love, ...

from Mr Spender,

This known great one has weakness  
To friends is most remarkable for weakness,  
His ill-temper at meals, his dislike of being contradicted,  
His only real pleasure fishing in ponds,

and from Mr MacNeice just the opening couplet of one of his best poems,

I meet you in an evil time.

The evil bells

Put out of our heads, I think, the thought of everything  
else ...

What these quotations obviously have in common is a conscious imitation of the tone of informal speech. Mr Auden, for instance, could have written,

It is not going to come any more,

without wrenching his metre. He wanted the speaker's slur on 'isn't', not the writer's emphasis on 'not'; thus he gets a flatly ominous effect, like an actor's deliberate throwing away of a strong line. Mr Spender, in his passage,

... *weakness*,

To friends is *most* remarkable for *weakness*,

makes his effect, as we often do in conversation, by a rather petulant harping on a key word, and by letting an adverb ('most'), which is weakly strong, reinforce the effect of an adjective ('remarkable') which is strongly weak: (in prose we might condense these two words, and say, 'notorious for weakness', just as in conversation we tend to uncondense such a literary adjective as 'fatuous' and say '*very* silly'). The trick of the conversational style in these two examples is obvious, but in Mr MacNeice's couplet the effect is much more subtly contrived. We cannot put a finger there on an isolated phrase that sets the colloquial note. The effect comes from a throwing and catching process – the word 'evil' flung by one speaker, and caught up in a different corner of the field by the other. They are talking, as they will be throughout the poem, slightly at cross-purposes. 'The times are corrupt'. 'The bells are jangling'. But they catch at each other's phrases, as we do in conversation, in order to get back to their own monologues. The phrase, 'I think', which looks at first like padding, reacts on 'the thought' rather as the two 'evils' react on each other: the idea of casual perception clashing with that of organized reasoning: and the false internal rhyme of 'out' and 'thought' and the cracked chime of 'bells' and 'else' help to reinforce this general effect of significant dissonance.



There can be, as this example shows, a great deal of conscious art behind the natural tone in poetry, though the passage from Mr Spender suggests that there is a risk, in this convention, of a flat and dragging effect. And in fact the diction of the best poetry of the 1930's cannot be dismissed as merely conversational. A poem would begin in an easy, off-hand, or even flippant fashion, but would rise at the appropriate moment to stateliness. For stateliness, the diction of that period had its own special rhetoric. That rhetoric can, in fact, be most easily studied in the early work of Mr Spender. Stateliness was more natural and congenial to him than a flat, conversational manner, and his transitions to stateliness are therefore more striking and abrupt than Mr Auden's or Mr MacNeice's. On the ground, he manœuvres clumsily but impressively, like an aeroplane; till suddenly, and dramatically, he takes off. In the earlier part of a poem he will be wrestling in the coils of some moral argument,

This prevents love  
And offers love of being loved or loving,

and apparently tying himself in knots. But then there will be a passage like this,

Also the swallows by autumnal instinct  
Comfort us with their effortless exhaustion  
In great unguided flight to their complete South.

There has been an attempt so far to extrude from the poem all obviously and cheaply emotive words; just because of that extrusion, epithets that express, with however much constriction, the idea of something rich and positive – 'autumnal', 'effortless', 'great', 'complete' – are raised to a new power. One might call this device, which was one of the main characteristics of the poetic diction of the 1930's, the cult of the dry, as opposed to the damp, emotive word.

Auden, too, for instance, uses the epithet 'complete' in this way,

This lunar beauty  
Is complete and early,

and it should be noticed how 'lunar beauty' refurbishes an old stage property, how it has an air of strictness ('strict' is another favourite epithet in the emotive vocabulary of the period) that would not belong to 'moonlike beauty' or 'beauty of the moon'. The trick is to take words which in ordinary usage are rather stilted and formal, and to use them to express positive values which otherwise might seem slack or sentimental. There is an excellent example in the most famous poem of Mr Charles Madge,

For we are the *commotion* born of love  
And slanted rays of that *illustrious* star,

where the two key words have probably not bothered us since our schooldays, a commotion in the corridor, and some illustrious personage in an old history book. The words are dusty, but the dust brushes off easily; where related words, like, for instance, 'emotion' and 'lustrous' (which are relevant, since we are intended to have an emotion about this commotion, and to think of the shining sun) have a kind of threadbare sheen from constant use.

Thus the poetic diction of the 1930's was a flexible one, with a range from ease to eloquence, with a well-bred restraint and with a considerable emotional power; and its tendency was both to rid the language of a number of stale poeticisms and to give a new force and dignity to a number of common words. What then was the reason for the violent reaction against it which began about 1940 and which (in spite of the valiant rearguard actions of critics like Mr Roy Fuller and Mr Julian Symons) has not yet come to an end? I think the main reason was a change in the poet's situation, his increasing isolation and exile in an increasingly confusing

world. The most promising new poets of the 1940's were either soldiers in the ranks, or, like the group that gathered round Mr Durrell and Mr Spencer in Cairo, civilians in a strange country. They were writing in an environment on which they could not directly act, and the world of poetry was therefore tending to become an increasingly personal and even private one. Because of a kindly but rather sentimental feeling that a war should both produce and encourage new poets, it was too easy for young writers to get published, and critical standards tended to be swamped. Editors welcomed emotional sincerity, even when that was accompanied by intellectual imprecision. Also, in an increasingly confusing and depressing world, the rational political optimism, which had been the leading intellectual theme of the best poetry of the 1930's, no longer seemed plausible. Where the best poetry of the 1930's had been one of one's guides to the outer world, the best poetry of the 1940's was concerned, in one way or another, with the inner life; in so far as the intensities of the inner life were not clearly related to a defined outer situation (in so far, that is, as poetry expressed emotions without providing motives for them), the diction of poetry tended to become increasingly precious, turgid, private, or confused.

One may believe that the reaction against the diction and attitudes of the 1930's was inevitable (as I do); and yet (as I do again) deplore some of its general results. One of its results has been a wide-scale current use of poetic diction in a really vicious sense to disguise a failure of choice, a confusion of character, or a lack of clear thought. Here is an admirably apt example:

Frost falls early this year. Early  
frost in the year foretells an iron spring,  
sapping the light, stopping the bone, clearly  
limning the eyes on the stair, the heart's lost beat,  
the empty corridor's whisper of unseen feet  
ebbing and flowing. Shall we stop the frost falling?

This is a kind of stanza which looks all right on the surface, and its readers are likely to blame themselves for not grasping anything definite, when they should blame the poet for not giving them anything definite to grasp. The lack of anything definite is masked by an emotional imprecision of language. If frost falls in early autumn, it has no relevance to the weather next spring. If it falls in January, it is properly a late winter frost. And if it falls in March, it does not foretell but announce a hard spring. And frost, for that matter, does not, like rain, hail, sleet, or snow, fall; it is the freezing of moisture already on the ground. It does not sap the light of the sun. On the contrary, it throws it back with an unusual brilliance. It perhaps saps the warmth in so far as, till the frost is melted, that cannot enter the ground and stir up the roots. The first two and a half lines of this stanza are likely to confirm a carping reader in a prejudice that poetry is a lofty kind of language in which nothing needs ever to be got exactly right.

‘Stopping the bone’ suggests that the frost in some way hinders animal and human as well as vegetable growth. But by now it is clear that the frost is a metaphor for some human condition, though not at all clear what human condition that might be. The frost limns (another imprecision, coming from remembering that frost makes clear patterns on a window pane, and from forgetting that these are not patterns of anything but itself) eyes on a stair – what eyes, what stair? – and other things that cannot be limned, such as a dropped heart-beat, and hallucinatory scurrings in a corridor, also compared to whispers and tides. The poet then asks us, shall we do anything to prevent this. But he has really not provided us with material for an answer.

We cannot stop real frost from freezing, and in so far as his metaphor is appropriate he should mean that we cannot do anything either about whatever human condition he has in mind; on the other hand, his frost behaves very oddly, and his point may be that his metaphor is inappropriate, that in fact we can do something about this human con-



dition; or, again, his attitude may be fatalistic but not pessimistic – we can do nothing about the frost, but his metaphorical year has only to roll on a month or two, and it will have melted, with no effort on his part or ours. His attitude might be one of surrender, defiance, or patient stoicism. The lines will lend themselves easily to each of these mutually exclusive interpretations. The author has failed to take a real stand about whatever situation he has in mind (and the reader is given no clue as to what that situation is), and he hopes that the reader, beguiled by a glamorous diction, by the dramatic if inaccurate behaviour of this poetic weather, by the stock ominous figure on the stair and the stock sinister noises in the corridor, will take his stand for him. There could not be a clearer example of the literary and even the moral dangers inherent in the ‘new romantic’ diction which has gradually, for so many of our younger poets, superseded the, in comparison, ‘classical’ diction of the 1930’s.

Oddly enough, this kind of denotative imprecision becomes more defensible when it is carried out more thoroughly. Speaking of a passage by Hart Crane, a passage that begins

Whose counted smile of hours and days, suppose  
I know as spectrum of the sea and pledge  
Vastly now parting gulf on gulf of wings  
Whose circles bridge, I know. ...

Mr Delmore Schwartz says, ‘Here ... one can question the denotative meaning of every line ... Some strange and complicated feeling for the connotations of words has made possible this kind of poetry. It ... can be compared to music (if one remembers that it is not the *sound* of the words so much as the associations of meaning which the words evoke that justify the musical comparison).’ The relevance of this remark to some of the work of Mr George Barker and Mr Dylan Thomas (and to all of the work of Mr W. S. Graham, who, in so far as I can understand his



theory of composition, relies entirely on associations of meanings and does not aim at providing even the thinnest thread of justifiable denotative sense) is obvious. This approach to language makes for confusion of all kinds, but it undoubtedly also makes for exceedingly 'powerful' writing of a sort; the greatest master of it in our time is perhaps the Chilean, Pablo Neruda, and (being a writer myself whose verse is generally *too much* tied to a basic prose sense) I have found it refreshing to translate him. Perhaps Mr Schwartz is too severe when he says that this mode of diction is an extreme 'made possible only by raw genius, ignorance, and self-delusion'. By translating Neruda, and by attempting to paraphrase some of Mr Thomas's more confusing-looking poems, I have discovered that this kind of writing can have a musical logic as well as a musical power: a logic that is a matter of repetition and variation of a leading theme. Yet one must feel that this sort of 'musical' diction is an exceedingly dangerous general model; one cannot ask people to express themselves as confusingly as possible, in the hope that their confusions will prove to have a clear underlying structure; for, as Mr Schwartz truly says, 'if this were the only kind of poetry most poetry would not be worth reading'.

There are other kinds of fashionable contemporary diction about which one feels similar doubts: particularly Mr Auden's recent 'baroque' diction, which does not fit in with the 'new romantic' revival, but is rather a sort of decadent classicism, lavish verbal ornament taking the place of a tight and interesting structure of thought and feeling. One purpose of 'The Age of Anxiety' seems to be to display Mr Auden's virtuosity, his almost callous determination that language shall be his servant and not his master, his gift of saying an obvious thing in an elaborate and surprising way, and here and there,

minerals break  
In by order on intimate groups of  
Tender tissues,

this leads to something that looks almost like real callousness. There is a sinister example in a recent short poem of Mr Auden's,

The cute little botts of the sailors  
Are snapped up by the sea.

This is a wonderfully dextrous pun on two contexts of a phrase. 'The wave, like a cat's tongue, snaps up the drowning sailors.' 'These are cute little articles, you had better snap them up while they are still in the stores.' It is a brilliantly heartless joke, but after we have admired and laughed with the brilliance, the heartlessness leaves a nasty tang. A lack of feeling, in the quite ordinary, everyday sense of feeling, seems to me to be the danger inherent in a baroque diction. Yet, no doubt, in one of the few younger poets who has developed, independently of Mr Auden, such a diction, Mr Iain Fletcher, such mannered lines as these,

All that smooth wilderness of hair  
And peacock-pleasantry of eyes,  
No more retract me to despair,  
Nor more I fornicate with sighs ...

are one of the pleasanter ways of evading the problem of having a definite attitude about our general situation.

The weakness, in fact, alike of the new romantic and the baroque dictions is that they encourage evasiveness; the strength of a quieter and more controlled diction is that it forces poets to adapt themselves to a real situation, to take some sort of a stand. And if the diction of much contemporary poetry is either moodily imprecise, slack, or inflated, that, no doubt, has something to do with the difficulty of taking a stand. In the last ten years, we have all had too much to digest (the success of a war and the failure of a peace), and our natural mood, in consequence, of mild, sad resignation is not one that makes for very inspiring poetry.

We find personal compensations for the general state of stale, continuing crisis, but it is hard to give these a general poetic relevance. The remedy for our present slugged condition is certainly not to go back to the 1930's, to shout dead slogans, and fight old battles over again: (like, for instance, Mr Roy Fuller, hammering away at his pet word, '*bourgeois*', at a time when most sane people are probably profoundly grateful for the liberal, the rational, the sensitive and the humane elements in the middle-class tradition). Yet if the actual methods and attitudes of the poets of the 1930's cannot be revived, even by themselves, there is still something to be said for reviving the spirit in which they approached language; one finds oneself almost morbidly alert to the diction of current poetry simply because literary conventions are getting too far away, once again, from the conventions of speech. The 'new romantics' have had a ten years innings; they have produced some fine individual poems but have left the tone, and the standards, of English poetry in general in a state of confusion. There can be no harm, anyway, in asking the coming poets of the 1950's to aim, in their diction, at closeness to natural feeling, at relevance, at restraint.